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THE DRONOCO CHIEF



LONDON: GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS.

THE
ORONOCO CHIEF ;

OR,

THE FORTUNES OF A DIAMOND LOCKET.

A Story of Adventure in South America.

By J. THOMAS WARREN.



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THE ORONOCO CHIEF.

CHAPTER I.

THE ARRIVAL.

Our anchors plunge in the dark-blue sea,
And we rest, our voyage o'er ;
While with merry hearts, and shouts of glee,
We gaze on the welcome shore.

AT daybreak upon the 2nd of May, in the year of Our Lord 1821, a squadron of four vessels cast anchor at the mouth of the Orinoco, off the eastern coast of Venezuela.

These four vessels were the British 44-gun frigate "Eurydice," and three transport ships. They had on board 1,500 British troops, composed of parts of several British regiments of the line, the entire body being styled "The British Legion," and under the command of Sir William De Courcy. Having received an appointment as Aide upon the Staff of Sir William, I accompanied the expedition in that capacity. These troops were designed as reinforcements to the patriots who, under the leadership of the celebrated Bolivar, were waging a war for independence against the power of Spain.

Thirteen years previous, Ferdinand VII., King of Spain, was inveigled by shameful treachery into the power of Napoleon, and cowardly surrendered for ever all claim for himself and descendants to the throne of Spain, and Joseph Buonaparte succeeded to the vacant crown. When the tidings of the imprisonment and abdication of the king reached Spanish America, it shook and unsettled the whole social system in those quarters.

Most intense antipathy toward the French prevailed. Under Napoleon they overran Spain, and, consequent upon

this, resistance broke out against their agents in the colonies, which finally culminated in an organized effort on the part of the colonists to establish their own independence. With varying fortunes the strife had now continued for nearly a dozen years, with the final settlement apparently as far distant as ever. The Royalists possessed the northern sea-coast to a great degree, and the principal ports and fortified cities ; while the interior of the country was mainly under the control of the patriots. This, in brief, was the situation of affairs upon our arrival in the province.

Our anchor had scarcely grated upon the pebbly bottom of the sea, when a puff of light-blue smoke arose from the bow of the frigate, followed by the report of a carronade. As the slight breeze that flapped the snowy canvas against the masts bore from our sight the circling wreaths of smoke, there was a similar response from a small fortified earthwork, situated upon a point of land formed by the junction of the river with the sea, and in an instant the patriot flag rose to the top of a small staff erected upon a bastion of the fort.

Communication was thus opened, and a boat left the shore, containing an officer and several marines. As soon as he reached the quarter-deck, the officer saluted Sir William, and handed him a small packet. It was a request from Bolivar that the officer commanding the expedition would proceed at once up the river to Angostura, the capital city of the Republic. After a few hours' delay, we weighed anchor, and, under the charge of a competent pilot, the squadron entered the delta of the river, the "Eurydice" leading the way.

The scenery was exceedingly beautiful. It was a cloudless morning, and a gentle breeze ruffled the waters of the river, while the surface of the sea shone like a polished mirror under the brilliant rays of the warm tropical sun, whose broad disk was now slowly climbing the eastern sky. As we ascended the magnificent stream, the scene changed into a most glorious panorama. Green meadows, towering palms with their fan-leaved crowns, and verdant groves of laurel

and amyris lined the banks, while masses of shrubs, bearing various coloured blossoms, made the air fragrant with sweet perfume. Vast flocks of aquatic birds sported upon the placid water.

My attention was equally divided between the luxuriant vegetation of this tropical clime and the pilot of our vessel, who was standing near the wheel, issuing an occasional order to the helmsman in charge. He was a diminutive fellow, with a swarthy, bronzed face, bushy hair, fierce moustaches, and black eyes. He wore a light-coloured sombrero, trimmed with red ribbon, which sat jauntily upon one side of his head. A jacket of green cloth, and buff-coloured breeches completed his attire. A group of soldiers were gathered around him, whom, contrary to ship regulations, he was entertaining with various stories and jokes.

"Come," said I to Lieutenant Haversham, an intimate friend of mine, and a capital good fellow, "let's hear what the chap has to say."

We approached the small group. At this time the vessel was just abreast of the ruins of a small fortification, that stood upon the left bank of the stream, and to which the pilot called our attention.

"D'ye see yon ruins, senors?" he asked, addressing Haversham and myself. "Well, captain, that's where I saw my first fight," continued the pilot, "and a right handsome little scrimmage it was, too; and, moreover, it was just yonder that the patriots found out that they could have their independence, if they wanted it."

"Some time ago, I judge?" said I.

"Si, senor, a matter of some ten years or so. We captured that fort, and afterward, with our cavalry, we took a gunboat too."

"Oh, blathers!" ejaculated Haversham, as he burst into an incredulous laugh, "took a gunboat with cavalry! Tell that to the marines."

"Senor, it is true, *per Dios*," returned the pilot, evidently much disconcerted at Haversham's disbelief.

"By St. George," said Haversham, with another hearty laugh, and evidently enjoying the pilot's confusion, "that's either a mighty tough yarn, or else you have a confounded queer way of fighting in this heathen country."

"*Caramba*, senor captain," added the pilot, fiercely, "we are not heathen, but honest Christians."

"Honest Christians!" returned Haversham with a smile. "Lucky you told us, else we had never suspected it."

"May be, senor, if you heard my story, you would believe me."

"Well, drive ahead, senor pilot, and we'll listen."

"You see, senor captain," began the pilot, stowing away a fresh quid in the corner of his capacious mouth, and gradually recovering his good-humour, "the thing happened in this way: Some dozen years ago, there were stationed in your fort a company of the king's soldiers, Diabolus take them all, under the command of one Captain Oviedo. A rich old Spaniard, by the name of Don Hermoso, owned a fine plantation a few miles inland. The Don, in addition to his fat purse, had a very pretty daughter, called Olivia. Now, it soon came to pass that Captain Oviedo fell in love with Donna Olivia, or, it matters little which, with her father's yellow *onzas*, and proceeded to pay assiduous attention to her.

Neither she nor the Don, however, received these visits with favour, for the captain was a brainless, conceited fellow, with an immense thirst for *aguardiente*, and, as rumour saith, could beat Satanas himself at cards and dice. So the old man forbade him the house. This was regarded by the captain as a mortal insult, and he laid his plans for revenge. Taking advantage of Don Hermoso's temporary absence, he, with a squad of his soldiers, assailed the hacienda, and carried off Donna Olivia. The old Don returned the next day, and was in high dudgeon over the affair. He raved like a mad bull, swore a string of oaths as long as a bower-cable, and vowed by all the saints in the calendar that he would hang every soul concerned in the outrage. He armed his

servants, and, aided by his neighbours, who made common cause with him, surprised the fort that night, and at day-break the corpses of Captain Oviedo and twenty of his men were dangling from the ramparts.

"News of these troubles reaching head-quarters, a gunboat was despatched down the river to retake the fort. The haughty old Don rejected all terms of surrender, when the gunboat opened fire. A few minutes' fight convinced the Don that the place was getting uncomfortably hot. He soon evacuated the fort, with colours flying, however. The Royalists at once took possession of the works again.

"Now, Don Hermoso had a son, Fernando, who was a reckless, dare-devil sort of a blade. This scion of a noble house groaned in spirit over the discomfiture of his illustrious father. He determined, therefore, to retrieve the reputation of the family. For this purpose he assembled all the kindred spirits within his reach, mounted them upon smart nags, and, under cover of night, reached the river, where the boat lay at anchor in the middle of the stream.

"We (for I was one of the party, senors) dashed right into the water, and urged our beasts toward the boat. The occupants, few in number, and unprepared for a night attack, were speedily overpowered, and at daylight we in turn banged away at the fort. The garrison, poor devils, were frightened to death at being fired upon by their own friends, as they supposed, and succumbed at once."

"Well, blow me," exclaimed Haversham, "that Fernando was a trump, anyhow."

"How did the matter end?" I inquired.

"Oh, senor captain," said the pilot, with a chuckle, "it's not ended yet. Ha, ha! but maybe you'll live to see the end some day—at least, *per Dios*, I hope so."

"Did the Government submit to this outrage upon its dignity?" I asked, with some curiosity.

"*Caramba*, no, senor. They sent another gunboat down, and a regiment of lancers, who recaptured the fort and the lost boat."

"What became of Fernando?" asked Haversham

"Poor fellow, he fell upon the deck of his prize, fighting bravely even to the last," replied the pilot, with a sigh.

"And Don Hermoso?" I queried.

"Oh, he was thrown into prison, and his property all confiscated to the Crown."

"Their rebellion was cut short, then?" I added.

"Diabola, senors, the affair set people to thinking, and when they thought a while, *per Dios*, they took up arms, and the abduction of Donna Olivia bids fair to result in our independence." The pilot's story was ended.

Thus, time passed along, and in due season our squadron anchored off the pretty little city of Angostura. The next day we received orders to disembark, much to the satisfaction of all concerned, as we were heartily weary of the long and tiresome passage.

The soldiers were billeted in various parts of the city, while Sir William and staff, including myself, engaged quarters at the "San Marco," the principal hotel in the city.

CHAPTER II.

ROUGE-ET-NOIR.

Aye! men do risk
And stake their very fortunes 'pon the throw
Of coloured dice, or cards and games of chance.
These ivory cubes and bits of paper
Have kingdoms crushed, and desolation wrought
Both at the fireside and in public walks
Of life. The dire results that from them spring
Are only known in vast eternity.

One warm, sultry evening, a fortnight after our arrival in Angostura, I was seated in front of the hotel "San Marco," quietly enjoying my cigar. The street presented an animated appearance. The entire population of the city seemed to be abroad. Gay cavaliers, and dashing senoritas with picturesque mantles and dark bewitching eyes, Llaneros with brilliant red and blue ponchos, swarmed by; while occasionally the lively scarlet uniform of our own corps enlivened the scene.

Opposite the "San Marco" stood a building of some architectural pretensions, from whose windows and open door poured forth a brilliant flood of light. A constant stream of visitors entered and departed.

"Really Ned," said Lieutenant Haversham, who was sitting on the balcony near me, as he sent a whiff of fragrant smoke curling upward in delicate wreaths, "these Spaniards beat the very deuce at gaming, don't they?"

"A favourite institution of theirs, I should judge," I replied, smiling at the sudden and energetic exclamation of my friend. "Been victimized any, eh?"

"Thank you, not at all," returned Haversham, with another vigorous pull at his cigar. "How in the dickens do you imagine that a simple lieutenant, who is serving our most gracious Majesty for the moderate compensation of a few pounds, shillings, and pence per annum, could indulge in so expensive a luxury? Far more danger that I shall lose my heart in a flirtation with some of these captivating *senoritas*, than that any of the avaricious Dons will fatten off *my* purse! Have you ever visited the salon opposite?"

"Never," I replied.

"Shall we go?"

"I'm agreed."

We crossed the street and entered. The salon was the most fashionable and best patronised in the city. The wealth and *élite* of Angostura often assembled there, for gambling is a national passion of the Spaniards and their descendants, and to visit such places of resort did not detract from, but rather added to, one's social position. To be ignorant of "monte," "faro," or "rouge-et-noir," was equivalent to being under the ban in fashionable society.

Our uniform gained us a ready admittance, and, ascending a broad staircase, we entered a magnificent room. A dozen richly-ornamented chandeliers gave forth a blaze of light. There was a great profusion of statuary, vases, coloured lights, frescos, and gilding. A gay assemblage was present. Our eyes were dazzled with rich dresses, sparkling gems, the

glitter of jewellery, epaulettes, stars, and badges of distinction.

We passed into another room. Here were faro-tables, and tables for rouge-et-noir, and heaps of glittering doubloons and yellow English sovereigns, which rapidly changed owners. Everything moved along briskly and quietly, with an occasional outburst of anger or joy as some won and others lost. As we promenaded the room, we found that our gay uniforms attracted much notice, winning us furtive glances from dark-eyed maidens. We stopped at a small table near a stand where a pretty waiter girl was selling wine, ice, and fruits. Two persons were engaged in a game of cards. Much interest appeared to centre upon this game, and quite a number of gentlemen and ladies had gathered around the table, anxious spectators of the scene. The players were a young man of very prepossessing appearance, who had won frequently from the other during the evening, and, excited over his good fortune, had now staked all his winnings, amounting to one thousand doubloons, and his entire property in addition, upon the result of this game. His opponent was a man apparently several years his senior, with hard, repulsive features, bronzed by constant exposure to the weather. The most remarkable feature was his eyes. Black as night, they pierced through one at a glance, and glittered like the eyes of a serpent. He wore the uniform and badge of a captain in the patriot army. He was cool and even composed, while the hands of the young man trembled with excitement.

As the game progressed, a dozen pair of eyes watched its advance with absorbing interest, and none with more anxiety than my own. At first a dim suspicion flitted across my mind. Another and a stronger one was experienced. I drew nearer the captain and watched more narrowly than before every move of the players. My suspicion assumed a more tangible form, and ripened into a conviction. The captain played with most provoking coolness. I knew the reason.

He was winning by foul play!

The game was finished. The captain won.

"My God! I'm undone!" groaned the young man, as he shoved back his chair from the table. "He has won my last real. I staked all, and have lost."

"The greater fool, then, for playing so high," impudently chuckled the captain, as he rose and swept the coin from the table. "Does any other one wish to stake his last real?" No response to the challenge. "No one stands a chance to win from me in the last game," he boastingly added, as he placed the cards in his pocket.

"An honest man seldom stands a chance when he plays with a knave," I said, my indignation getting the better of my discretion.

"*Caramba!*" exclaimed the captain, turning quickly around upon his heel, "who calls me a knave?" He cast a rapid, fierce glance over the adjacent company. His eyes moved along and rested upon me. Intuitively he seemed to recognise in me the speaker. I had gone too far to recede, and met his fiery gaze with an eye that quailed not. The blood coursed like lightning through my veins, my flesh seemed on fire. I felt that the attention of all was concentrated upon me, as, in a voice tremulous with rising excitement, I said—

"I am the offender, Sir; and I repeat it, you are a villain!"

The captain's face grew dark as night, his eyes glistened like a basilisk, and he made a move as if to spring upon me. We were standing a few feet apart. I threw myself into a posture favourable for repelling an assault, and stood upon the defensive. The captain's demeanour changed instantly, and with a sneer he asked—

"And who, pray, senor, are you, that dares impute villainy to me?"

"My name, Sir, is Ellesmere, Aide to Sir William De Courcey," I answered, maddened by the sarcastic tone of the audacious captain; "and I furthermore say, that you won the last game with this youth by foul play."

"*Miles toutres!*" ejaculated the captain, again losing his

temper. "It is false ! There was no foul play. You have insulted me ;" and he ground his teeth with rage.

"If to tell the truth is to insult you, then perhaps I have," I added quietly.

"*El Demonio !*" screamed the infuriated man. "I demand satisfaction. You must fight me at daybreak !"

"I have no objections, Sir," I said.

"Have you a friend with whom my second can confer?" asked the captain, moderating his tone somewhat upon my ready compliance.

"I think I can count upon Lieutenant Haversham, can I not?" said I, turning to my companion, who stood at my elbow.

"To the last drop of blood, Ellesmere," quickly answered the generous and impulsive fellow ; "and if the scoundrel harms a hair of your head, by Jove, I'll run him through myself !"

"Where can Lieutenant Haversham be found, an hour hence?" continued the captain.

"Our quarters are at the 'San Marco.'"

"The thing is settled, then," rejoined the captain, as he turned haughtily away, preparatory to taking his departure.

"One moment, Sir," I added.

"How," he sneeringly asked ; "do you already repent your acceptance to fight with me?"

"I desire one thing further, Sir," I quietly replied, not noticing his insinuation.

"And what, pray, is that?" he asked, with an air of surprise.

"I wish you to play a game of rouge-et-noir with me."

"*Diabolo !*" he fairly shouted. "Play with the man whose throat I shall cut at day-break?"

"You decline then?" I suggested.

"No, by all the gods ; no," roared the enraged captain. "*Carrai*, I will take your last *maravedi*, and then send you to Satan's ! That will be my revenge."

We sat down at the table. The exciting affair had brought

around us a large portion of those present. At my right hand stood the youth, whom my opponent had fleeced so unfairly, his eyes staring wide open with astonishment at the unforeseen results of his game. The acting banker was the proprietor of the salon, and, I thought, was in all probability a friend of my opponent. The *croupiers* assumed their proper positions.

"A thousand Spanish doubloons is my stake," said I.

"Make it two thousand, or I'll not play," the captain replied.

"Two thousand let it be, then," I answered; "it is immaterial to me which."

I told the truth when I said that, although in a far different sense than my opponent understood it. The amount was, indeed, immaterial to me, for fifty guineas covered all my available resources, and, if I lost, I subjected myself to the ridicule and disgrace of the exposure. But the excitement of the occasion, and a certain confidence that I should win, urged me on. He staked the gold, and I staked my word of honour as an officer, which was accepted. The game proceeded. The excitement in the throng increased rapidly. The room became excessively hot. The air was close and oppressive. The crowd jostled each other, and surged to and fro. The cards were dealt out so slowly, that it seemed to consume an age. I thought the game would never end. My brain whirled with excitement and I grew dizzy. A shout of exultation from the crowd recalled my thoughts.

The game was mine!

I was rising from the table. With a furious oath, the captain declared I must play again. Overcome by my good fortune, I rashly consented.

"A thousand pounds sterling, is my stake this time," said the captain, in a voice hoarse with anger, as he plunged his hand into his bosom, and drew forth a capacious wallet, which he opened. His face instantly changed colour and assumed an ashy paleness, his hand trembled, and the book fell to the floor.

"*Mulre de Dios!*" he screamed, with uncontrollable fury.
"It's gone! I've been robbed!"

"What have you lost?" anxiously inquired the banker.

"A bill of exchange, on London for one thousand pounds, is gone, Sir. I had it here in this wallet," replied the captain, greatly distressed.

"I keep an honest house, captain; and you did not lose it here, I am confident," said the banker.

"Don't let his pretended loss trouble you, senor," I said to the banker. "We all understand his game. He is playing bluff, and is afraid to try another run with me, that's all."

"Scoundrel," exclaimed the captain, turning upon me a look of concentrated fury and malice, as stung to the quick by my taunt, he resumed his seat, "we will soon see whether I flinch or not."

He tore open his scarlet vest, and drew forth a golden-cased locket, which he opened and laid upon the table. It was a lady's picture, encircled with gems.

"That is my stake, then. It is worth one thousand pounds, cash, any day."

"Ah! your lady love, set in diamonds of paste, probably," I suggested, "and worth, perhaps, a dozen crowns."

"The setting is genuine, and the case is very heavy, at least twenty carats fine," said the banker, examining it carefully. "No doubt it is valuable."

"Well, then," said I, with an air of condescension, "we'll accept as a stake this portrait of his lady love."

"*Peste*, lady love!" exclaimed the captain, with a look of supreme disgust, "my hatred of her is only equalled by what I now bear toward you. Play on."

My winnings in the last game constituted my stakes in this, and the play proceeded. The result was announced amid a burst of applause from the interested spectators.

I had won again!

"My turn comes at daybreak!" hissed the captain, through his compressed lips, as he rose suddenly from the table and rushed from the salon.

The applause increased, as I turned to the unfortunate youth, who had previously lost what I had just won, and told him it was again his property, and advised him in the future to play only with honest men. So lavish were his thanks, and so profuse his demonstrations of gratitude, that I was overwhelmed thereby and glad to escape. Placing the miniature in my breast-pocket, and taking Haversham's arm, I left the room.

The night air was cooling to my fevered brow. The streets were nearly deserted. We repaired to my room at the "San Marco."

"By Jove, what a splendid game you played, Ned," said Haversham, breaking the silence.

"Say, rather, that I had a run of good luck," I answered.

"The thing was magnificently done, anyway, Ned," continued Haversham, "except one item."

"What do you allude to?" I queried, in some surprise.

"Why, confound it, Ned, I didn't exactly see the use of handing over the proceeds of your skill to that white-livered young Spaniard. If the youthful jackanapes hadn't sense enough to keep it before you restored it to him, my word for it, he will lose it again within the week; and then, how much will your generosity avail him? You made a mistake, I think, in not keeping the winnings yourself."

"I only played, Haversham," I replied, "because I wished to make that swindler disgorge his ill-gotten gains. I had faith that justice would enable me to triumph, and you see she did. Besides, Haversham, I am opposed from principle to gambling for money. Wealth gained in such a manner would only be a curse to me. My conscience would goad me continually."

"Can't see the point, Ned," continued Haversham, laughingly; perhaps it's all right. I never could chop logic successfully, even when I was at Eton. I never attempted to argue any question that I didn't get flayed in the operation; and it's not worth while to begin logic at this late day. Besides, my conscience was never over tender, Ned; and a

tender conscience, you know, goes a great way, often, in deciding knotty points in a particular direction. Still, there is one thing in your argument that isn't so clear to my mind."

"What's that?"

"Why, I thought you were a lover of consistency, Ned."

"So I am," said I.

"Well, then, why don't you practice what you preach?" asked Haversham, with a broad grin.

"I don't understand what you are talking about, Haversham," said I, with some curiosity. "Do you mean to say that I act inconsistently?"

"That's it, exactly."

"How?"

"Why you see," continued Haversham, "this is what bothers me. You claim that it's wrong to gamble, and, if you win property in that way you ought to return it. Now you returned the money you won, to its original owner, but you didn't offer to give back the locket to the captain! Why keep it? Has its beauty so shaken your principles that you can be content to retain it? Eh, Ned, what's the matter?"

At this point Haversham burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter, which continued for several moments.

"I wasn't laughing at you, Ned," he resumed, "but at the recollection of what our worthy old teacher used to tell me whenever I rose in my place to recite. 'Haversham, you would make a splendid logician, if you were not continually violating every rule of logic that has been established since the days of Aristotle.' Glorious old professor, with his huge wig and long pigtail, and steel spectacles!"

"You forget, Haversham," I replied, "that the captain gave me no opportunity to return the locket to him, for he left the room hurriedly. I shall return it, on the first convenient occasion."

"The devil! You don't propose to return it to the captain?" asked Haversham, his eyebrows rising with surprise.

"Assuredly, I do. Why not? I must to be consistent," and I laughed in turn.

"Why not? Confound consistency!" ejaculated Haversham. "By St. George, I'd see the dog of a Spaniard well on his way to Tophet first! Faugh, Ned, don't do it," continued he, with a look of ineffable disgust at the very thought. "But, let's take a look at the locket."

I drew it forth, and throwing ourselves on the lounge we examined it attentively. It was of an oval shape and a trifle larger than an ordinary time-piece. The case was of gold, of very fine quality, heavy, and elaborately engraved. A vase of flowers was exquisitely carved upon the back of the locket, while upon the front was a beautiful dove with pinions spread, and carrying an olive-branch in its beak. A small silken cord and a ring were attached, evidently for the purpose of carrying it conveniently about the person. The interior arrangements of the locket were very rich and ornamental. It contained upon the under side of the lid, neatly coiled together, several tresses of dark hair, soft as the finest silk. On the other side was a female head and bust of the rarest beauty. The complexion was very fair—too much so I thought for a Spaniard. The eyes were very dark, and very soft, and shaded with the most delicate lashes. The mouth was small and finely formed. The forehead full and high; and the entire contour of the face was classic, and a model for an artist. A profusion of rich, dark hair flowed over a neck and shoulders, for whiteness as though chiselled from purest Parian marble.

"Pride of Venus!" ejaculated Haversham. "What surpassing loveliness!"

I was silent. The wondrous beauty of the face subdued all trifling feelings, and filled my soul with emotions too deep and overpowering for utterance.

There was a knock at the door. A waiter handed a note to Haversham, and retired. It was brief, and ran thus:—

"A friend of Captain De Alvaro awaits Lieutenant Haversham in the office, to arrange for the meeting at daybreak."

This note recalled us, as it were, from the visions of dream-land to the stern realities of the present.

"Well, the scoundrel is prompt, anyway," said Haversham, gaily ; "and now, as you are the party challenged, it remains for you to decide upon the weapons with which you desire to slay this dog of a Spaniard."

"Oh, you know that I use the pistol to better advantage than any other weapon," I replied.

"Well, pistols let it be," said Haversham, "and the time daybreak?"

"Yes," said I ; "have it over as soon as possible."

The lieutenant departed, and soon returned in high glee over the prospective meeting. Everything was arranged to his entire satisfaction. We were to fight at daybreak, on the river road a mile from the city—weapons, pistols—distance ten paces.

Haversham retired to enjoy a sound nap, while, without undressing or extinguishing the light, I threw myself upon the bed.

The excitement consequent upon the events of the evening having subsided, I was enabled to review the incidents of the past few hours with that degree of calmness and reason which their importance demanded. I was not long in arriving at the conclusion that I had got myself into a confounded unlucky scrape. The natural impetuosity of my temper, joined to a morbid sympathy for the misfortunes of another, whom I should in all probability never see again, and who, doubtless, would not remember me a fortnight, had inveigled me into a quarrel with a second stranger, with whom I was to engage in mortal combat. I was vexed and annoyed with myself and my folly beyond measure. The affair was so public that our corps would soon get wind of it, and thus I should become the butt of jokes and ridicule without end. Moreover, should the general hear of it, I stood a reasonably good chance to be cashiered and sent home, for the *duello* was strictly forbidden, and the regulations upon this point were rigidly enforced to the fullest extent.

This was, however, only one view of the possible results.

There was another possible issue, which it was by no means agreeable to contemplate. It often happens that when men shoot at each other with pistols at ten paces somebody is killed ; and in this case that somebody might be *myself* !

This was the most unpleasant feature in the affair. Doubtless, unless my usually correct aim should fail, my opponent had but a few hours to live. But this was small consolation ; and if I escaped unhurt, it would be but little gratification to remember that I had taken the life of a fellow-being who had really done me no harm whatever, and with whom I should have had no quarrel, had I not interfered in that which was not exactly my business. But affairs were now in that advanced stage that all means of honourable retreat were denied, and nothing remained except to stand up like a man, and brave the consequences.

Haversham had taken my pistols in charge, a capital pair by the way, purchased in the Strand, London, and which had seen much service, and with which I had won the reputation of being a splendid shot. It lacked still three hours of day-break, but I had not and could not sleep. Most persons in my situation would have consumed the time in writing affectionate remembrances and last missives to the dear ones at home, to be delivered in case of any fatal accident. I had no home. Left an orphan at an early age, for years I had struggled for the bare right of existence. Finally a better fortune dawned upon me, and I prospered. Being of an adventurous turn of mind, I enlisted in the military service of Great Britain, and, after seeing much active duty in foreign parts, had, by constant good behaviour, been gradually advanced in rank. Shortly before our expedition sailed from England, I had been appointed an Aide upon the staff of Sir William De Courcey, and in that capacity was now serving.

Sir William had apparently conceived an attachment for me, and had intrusted to my care, at various times, much important business, which, I flattered myself, I had performed to his entire satisfaction. With a spirit invariably

kind toward his subordinates, he was, nevertheless, a strict disciplinarian, and I had no hesitation in believing that, if he thought the good of the service required it, he would cashier in disgrace even his own son. There was, therefore, no chance of my misdemeanor being overlooked, should he by any means become acquainted therewith.

Agitated by such thoughts, I threw myself upon the lounge, and finally dropped off into a fitful, unrefreshing slumber.

CHAPTER III.

A QUEER DUEL AND A CAYMAN.

Look ye, sirs!
 The breath of murder loads the air to-night—
 Be watchful and be wary. —OLD PLAY.
 Two men marched out in all their stately pride,
 And ranged themselves upon the river side:
 Each in his hand a fatal weapon bore,
 More deadly than Toledo blade of yore.
 While one stood firm, the other ran away,
 And thus both lived to fight another day. —DUMARS.

A LOUD rap at the door, followed immediately by the entrance of Haversham, aroused me from my reverie. My friend was dressed, and ready for the expedition.

“Heigho, Ned!” he exclaimed, in a cheery voice, “you are up to time, I see.”

“Has the hour arrived?” I quietly asked.

“Wants just thirty-five minutes of five, which is the appointed time.”

“Then we must start.”

“Yes; the carriage is at the door.”

I threw on my great-coat, and in a few minutes we were being rapidly driven along the Calle Real. There were four of our party—our two selves, my coloured servant Okra, and a surgeon, whose services Haversham had impressed for the occasion. Okra was a stout, neatly built, and good-looking negro, who had attached himself to me during a campaign in Egypt, and had persistently declared that he would never forsake his “Massa Capt.,” as he always called

me. He had given many proofs of devotedness, and I prized him highly, as he was a very faithful, willing, and obedient servant.

The horses, a pair of noble iron-grays, dashed along at a furious rate. The day had already dawned, and ruddy streaks of light were tinting the eastern horizon.

"A fine morning for such an excursion," remarked the doctor.

I remained silent. Haversham took up the conversation with the disciple of Esculapius, and acknowledged that the state of the weather suited his ideas of propriety exactly.

"Ever engaged in such an affair before?" persistently continued the doctor, who was evidently determined to talk.

"Only twenty-eight times," replied Haversham, with the utmost gravity, while I could not help smiling at the monstrous falsehood the fellow uttered, for, to my certain knowledge, he had never witnessed but two duels in his life.

"Ah!" said the worthy doctor, as he bestowed a look of surprise and admiration upon the hero of so many combats, "it's an old story to you, then?"

"I'd rather fight than kiss a pretty damsel, any day," continued Haversham.

"It is just one year ago to-day," said the doctor, "since I participated in my last transaction of this nature, and a decidedly interesting time we had of it, too."

"Ah!" said Haversham; "happen here?"

"No," replied the doctor, who was evidently a loquacious fellow, and had now accomplished what he desired—that is, a chance to narrate his experience; "it happened around on the coast, at Porto Cabello. Captain Doblado, as genuine a scoundrel, by the way, as lives on this side of the salt water, had a dispute with a fellow officer named Loriquez, and, having been drinking, became so insulting that Loriquez was compelled to call him out. The result was that Loriquez received a ball through his brain, and the captain was dismissed the service. Enraged at his disgrace, Doblado at once went over to the Royalists, and has since been exceed-

ingly active and successful in their employ. Have you heard his name mentioned since your arrival ? ”

“ I have heard Captain Doblado, a guerilla chief, frequently spoken of,” answered Haversham. “ He was lately skirmishing beyond the river with the lancers of General Paez, was he not ? ”

“ Exactly ; that is the same person,” proceeded the doctor. “ From a most ardent patriot, he has become an active enemy to their cause. Acquainted with the country and the people, he is enabled to render valuable assistance to our enemies. He has gathered around him a band of desperadoes and renegades, as bold and bad as himself, and, under the cover of a captain’s commission in the Royalist army, he often perpetrates many wanton and unprovoked cruelties. So atrocious, indeed, were the outrages perpetrated by this leader, that, by a special order of the commandant of the district, he was pronounced an outlaw, and a reward of a hundred doubloons offered for his arrest—which reward is still outstanding ; the cunning and activity of the fellow rendering thus far futile all attempts to capture him.”

By this time we came within sight of the rendezvous, and found ourselves the first on the ground. The place selected for our meeting was a broad, open field, flanked on the left by a grove of palm trees, while the still placid waters of the Oronoco washed the opposite side. The carriage stopped under a palm tree, and we alighted. Haversham drew forth from beneath his cloak my pistol-case, took therefrom the weapons and examined them. He pronounced them in fine order, having loaded and prepared them with his own hands. Ten minutes elapsed. No signs yet of our opponents. I drew out my watch. The hands indicated ten minutes to five. Five minutes more passed away. No arrival. Five o’clock came. Not a sound disturbed the deathlike stillness of the scene. The doctor became very impatient. The sun rose higher into the vault of heaven, scattering broadcast over river and field and grove his cheering rays. A few small boats, with broad lateen sails, moved slowly along the

opposite side of the river, the gentle breeze that urged them on scarcely stirring a ripple upon the placid surface of the water. Haversham paced the ground uneasily.

"The cowardly whelp has disappointed us, I fear," he suddenly ejaculated, in a tone of bitter disappointment. "We shall lose our breakfast, and have our ride for nothing."

To confess the truth, I really began to hope it might be so. Not that I felt any fear, for the incidents of many a hard-fought battle-field had taught me long since that no cowardly blood flowed in my veins. But the cause of our quarrel was so trifling that my better judgment disapproved entirely of the meeting.

"We have waited fifteen minutes beyond the time," said Haversham; "we may as well return to the city."

"I fully concur with you, senor," added the doctor.

"I leave it entirely to your decision, gentlemen," I answered.

"Then we'll return," said Haversham.

We entered the carriage, the door closed, Okra mounted the box, and cracked his whip, and the carriage rolled away. We had not proceeded a dozen yards, when the sharp report of a pistol rung out upon the still morning air. The horses came to a sudden stop.

"What in the devil's to pay now!" shouted Haversham, excitedly, as he threw open the door of the vehicle and sprung to the ground, followed by the doctor and myself.

"Dar, mass'r, see um!" said Okra, pointing with his whip toward the river.

Our eyes were instantly turned in the direction indicated. A small boat was approaching the shore. It contained four persons. Two were seated at the oars, a third was reclining in the stern, while the fourth stood at the bow, waving a white handkerchief to attract our attention. We instantly surmised that they were the opposite party, who had come by water instead of the road. This supposition was corroborated by their arrival on the spot.

"You are late, gentlemen," said Haversham, in a tone of severity, "and we are under no obligations to fulfil the engagement."

"We were unavoidably delayed by the breaking of an oar," answered the captain's second; "but, if you desire to back out, you have undoubtedly the right to do so."

"Do not flatter yourself, Sir," replied Haversham, his temper rising at the sneering tone of the other speaker, "that we purpose doing anything of the kind. We came here to fight, and that's just what we intend to do. I only mentioned your tardiness to convince you that we waive all such technicalities in your favour."

"Oh, of course," returned the other, in the same aggravating tone; "we understand all that."

"Then, Sir, as it is already late, let us to business at once."

"Certainly, Sir, with pleasure," said the captain's second. "Shall I step the distance?"

"Yes."

Ten paces were measured off, and we proceeded to take our proper positions. The captain had not condescended to speak to any of our party, but maintained a stiff, dignified silence. As he strode to the position assigned him, a fiendish expression covered his face, otherwise he exhibited no outward signs of emotion.

"Are you ready?" asked his second.

"No, Sir, we are not," replied Haversham.

"What is wanting?"

"I object to the position in which you have placed my friend," said Haversham.

"Why so?"

"He faces the sun, and is in direct line with yonder tree to the rear."

These objections were soon obviated by a change of place. The other incidentals were speedily arranged. It was agreed that Haversham should count three, and at the word "Three" we were to fire.

Stepping back a few paces, Haversham began slowly and deliberately to count :—

“ One—two—”

A loud and confused shouting in the direction of the palm grove arrested his count. I glanced that way. A sergeant, followed by a dozen soldiers, wearing the blue uniform of the patriots, was seen emerging from the grove, and running at full speed toward us. The sergeant was screaming at the top of his lungs, and gesticulating vehemently. We were all taken aback at this sudden and unexpected interruption. I was totally at a loss to account for it. My first impression was that the soldiers were a detachment from the city, ordered to arrest us for attempting to fight a duel. This idea, however, vanished instantly when I recollected that there were no regulations existing in this strange country for restraining indulgences of this kind ; but that, on the contrary, single encounters were an everyday occurrence among a people naturally hot-tempered and passionate. Again, had an arrest been contemplated, it would have been executed by order of Sir William, and by British soldiers.

My opponent, however, did not appear so much at a loss in conjecturing the object of this raid upon our privacy. Without awaiting the time to fire, he no sooner caught a glimpse of the approaching soldiery, than he raised his pistol and discharged it full at my head. The ball severed a lock of hair above my left ear. Then turning, the captain started at the top of his speed for the boat, with the balance of his party close upon the heels of their valorous leader. By this time the troops were nearly abreast of us, and with a furious twirl of his sword in our direction, the sergeant shouted—

“ It is the guerilla Doblado ! Seize him ! Seize him ! ”

I was so completely overcome with surprise as the truth first upon me, that my opponent of the previous evening and the man who had just fired at me was no other than the villain whose atrocities had been so lately detailed to us by the doctor, and whose very name was a terror to all, that I

did not at once respond to the urgent appeal of the sergeant. The captain and his friends had such a start, and ran with such celerity, that they were fairly embarked and already some distance out, before the sergeant reached the shore.

"Fire at them! fire!" he shouted frantically to his men.

A scattering volley from the carbines of the soldiers was discharged. None of the shots seemed to have taken effect—some falling short, while the greater part went far beyond the boat, pattering upon the distant water like hailstones. About one hundred and fifty yards from the shore lay a small island, densely covered with thickets of dwarfish bushes, chiefly a species of the mimosa, and shrubs bearing bright, canary-coloured blossoms, while occasionally the broad-leafed crown of the palm-tree towered above. The island was perhaps seventy-five yards in length, and a third as wide. Doblado, who had grasped the tiller of the boat, was striving to direct their course so as to secure the protection offered by the dense foliage of the island.

Before the tardy soldiery could reload their pieces, the boat disappeared from view and gained the wished-for shelter. The sergeant swore furiously, but seemed at a loss how to proceed, as he had no boat with which to pursue the foe.

"By Jove!" shouted Haversham, in ecstasy, "this is getting exciting! Come, let us take a hand in it ourselves."

"There is no time to lose, then," said I, as we both ran hastily to the water's edge. The cowardly act of the guerilla, in firing upon me before he ran, gave an additional reason for my desiring to see the villain receive his just deserts, and I participated in the effort to secure the offender with much zeal.

"The dog of a Spaniard will push directly across the river, protected from our fire by the island," said I energetically to the sergeant. "We must not stand here idle a moment longer."

"*Peste*, what can we do without a boat?" he replied.

"Do!" I exclaimed, losing my temper at the fellow's listlessness. "Follow my directions, and I will tell you."

Like the majority of those who are clothed with brief and limited authority, the sergeant seemed very much indisposed to accept any advice upon the subject, but only swelled the more with a sense of his own dignity.

“*Per Dios!*” exclaimed Haversham, furiously, shaking his fist under the sergeant’s nose, “I’ll report you at headquarters if you permit Doblado to escape.”

“Gorra mity! He be big fool to loose dem hundred lubbledoons, w’at de doctor tole ’bout. Dat’s so! He!” chuckled Okra, with a broad grin, who had left the horses and joined the party.

Okra’s argument seemed to strike the sergeant even more favourably than that of Haversham, and he consented to follow my directions. I perceived at once that a very simple disposition of our forces, which consisted of eighteen men, could prevent the guerilla from crossing the river except from a severe cross-fire from the soldiers. I selected two points upon the river-bank, one being some two hundred yards above, and the other the same distance below the island. At each of these points I stationed three men, with orders to fire at the boat should it appear. The fire from these two points crossed at a spot in the river fifty yards beyond the island, thus exposing the boat, in any attempt to leave the island, to the converging fire of both parties. This plan compelled the guerillas to remain, for the present at least, prisoners upon the island as we thought they would scarcely venture out under the cover of six carbines.

The next move was by no means so apparent. Although driven into close quarters, the game was beyond our reach. The channel, over a hundred yards wide, and very deep, lay between us and the island, while the Oronoco, at this point, was a mile at least. We held a council of war, to determine upon the best course to pursue. Every one had an opinion to offer, but nothing practicable was presented. We thought of constructing a raft upon which to float over, but the want of proper tools put that plan out of the question. Haversham proposed that we should swim over; but there being only

four of us who possessed the requisite ability, that project was dropped.

"There's nothing but a siege in prospect," growled Haversham, who was fast becoming restive under our inaction.

"Perhaps a boat may be found somewhere along the stream," suggested the doctor, who was out of humour for not being able to recognize Doblado before the soldiers arrived.

"At all events," said the sergeant, "we will institute a search for something that will float."

A soldier was sent up and another one down the stream, with orders to impress into service any craft that promised to assist us.

"Meanwhile," continued the sergeant, "I believe I'll try a volley among the bushes over there. A stray shot sometimes will do execution."

I regarded this as a mere waste of powder, but made no reply.

"Aim low among the bushes," ordered the officer, "and blaze away!"

The twigs and blossoms flew in every direction, and great flocks of ducks rose in huge circles and slowly flew up the stream with loud outcries. No sign of our enemies appeared, and we subsided into peace again.

"Gorra, mass'r Capt.," suddenly exclaimed Okra, springing to his feet, "me t'inks ob good plan!"

"Well, Okra, enlighten us," I replied, smiling, for although I knew the black to be a smart, quick-witted fellow, I felt no confidence that any other plan than by boat was possible.

"Why, mass'r Capt., my plan am dis. I'll jist gwine up an' unhitch dem hosses, and we'll make um boat ob de coach, an' paddle him ober yonder."

The hearty laugh which greeted this proposition rather disheartened the black, and he looked much dispirited.

"Why, Okra, the confounded old vehicle is half iron, and would go to the bottom like a stone."

"Didn't t'ink ob that, mass'r Capt.," answered Okra, crest-fallen over my objections; "but s'pose it mus' be fac'."

Although my servant's plan was impracticable, it set me upon a train of thought that finally worked out a new expedient. We could not use the coach, but might we not bring the horses into requisition? I thought a while, and then remarked—

“I think, Haversham, I have it now.”

“Have what, Ned?” quietly asked the latter, who had stretched himself out at full length, and was enjoying his cigar.

“What do you suppose, Mr. Laziness?” I replied. “I have thought of a feasible plan of crossing the channel.”

“Well,” said Haversham, puffing away quietly, “propound it; I'm all ears.”

“We have two good horses hitched to yonder carriage.”

“No doubt of that. Go on,” said Haversham.

“Horses are good swimmers, you know,” I continued.

“Another axiom, too.”

“They can each carry three, and six of us can manage those fellows on the island,” I added.

“Ha! ha!” laughed Haversham, sitting up and indulging in a hearty laugh. “Why you are crazy, Ned. Three men on one horse would reach the bottom of the river sooner than Okra's vehicle.”

“I didn't propose that they should all mount the horses,” said I, with a smile at Haversham's outburst of merriment.

“Let one ride the horse, and the other two can cling to the tail, and thus obtaining support, we'll soon reach the island.”

“The devil,” roared Haversham, jumping into the air; “a glorious plan! Just the thing. Perfectly feasible. Okra, unhitch the animals, and bring them here instanter. Come, fly, you ace of spades!”

Thus urged, Okra trotted off at a lively pace, and soon returned with the two animals, from which he had removed the harness, save the bridle on each. Throwing off our hats, coats, and boots, Haversham and I mounted the horses. Our pistols, with sufficient ammunition for a dozen rounds each, were placed in our belts. We then rode into the stream a few yards until the water reached the breasts of the beasts.

The sergeant and five of his men, upon further consultation, decided to go with us. They were partially divested of clothing, and in their belts wore the long slender sword, peculiar to the soldiers of that country. Owing to the difficulty of carrying ammunition and keeping it dry, their carbines were left behind. We anticipated a close hand-to-hand struggle, and relied upon our knives, and such pistol-shots as Haversham and myself might be able to give, to carry us through successfully.

The sergeant and two men seized hold upon the tail of my horse, resting a hand also upon his rump. Three others attached themselves in a similar manner to Haversham's horse, and we plunged into the deep stream. The surface of the water was very smooth, and there was scarcely any perceptible current. The horses were powerful swimmers, and struck out boldly for the island.

Things worked finely. We reached the middle of the channel, when a scream of terror was heard from the mainland.

"*El cayman! el cayman! Per Dios, camarades, come back, come back! El cayman!*" shouted the doctor, in a frightened tone.

As I turned my head toward the shore, a sight met my gaze that froze the blood in my heart. A huge cayman, or crocodile, had risen to the surface of the water, and with jaws widely extended was gliding quietly but rapidly toward our party.

A single glance revealed the fact that it was not a black cayman, more commonly known by the name of alligator, but a veritable "yellow cayman," the most ferocious and bloodthirsty of all the saurian species.

The crocodiles of the Oronoco always have been noted for their savage natures and boldness, while in size and form they bear a striking resemblance to those found in the rivers of Africa. They possess a remarkable degree of cunning, and will often plunge beneath the water as soon as the hunter points his gun toward them. So ferocious, moreover, are

they, that they not unfrequently attack persons upon the river's bank, or pursue canoes for miles.

From experience in eastern countries, I knew it was almost impossible to kill them, the only vulnerable points about these creatures being the nape of the neck and the armpit.

Such was the monster that had risen to the surface some twenty five yards only from our party, and at once moved toward Haversham's horse, which happened to be the nearest to him. I seized my pistols, and taking a rapid aim, fired directly at the reptile's neck. At the same instant two carbines were discharged from the shore by Okra and the doctor.

The balls seemed to glance harmlessly from him, and did not tend in the least to impede his advance. With desperate energy, Haversham strove to turn his horse's head toward the shore, but the poor animal, apparently aware of the danger, and overcome with fright, snorted and plunged, and became unmanageable, filling the air with piercing outcries. The unfortunate soldiers were speechless with terror, and clung convulsively to the horse, fearing to lose their hold upon the beast, lest they should be drowned.

The crisis had now arrived. The cayman, raising its body partly from the water, seized the horse in its open mouth, and as the ponderous jaws closed upon the quivering flesh, the crushing sound of breaking bones was plainly heard. With a shriek of mortal agony the doomed horse and the cayman sunk together. A violent splash of the monster's tail, as he disappeared, threw enormous jets of water high into the air.

The surface was red with blood for the space of several yards around the scene of conflict. As the waters became quiet again, I anxiously looked for Haversham. Not a man of the four could be seen. The agony of mind and thrill of horror that I experienced for a moment completely prostrated me. My horse, left to himself, swam rapidly toward the point from which we had started, with the sergeant and the men still retaining their hold upon him.

"Gorra mity!" exclaimed Okra, dancing with delight as

he pointed down the stream. "Dar he be, mass'r Capt., dar be Habbysam!"

I felt wonderfully relieved to see Haversham swimming vigorously toward the shore. All parties were soon landed.

"Thank God, Haversham," I exclaimed, rushing up and grasping him by the hand. "Thank God, you're safe. Hurt at all?"

"Not a scratch, I think, Ned," said Haversham; "but confoundedly scared I must admit, and half drowned, too."

"A narrow escape, truly."

"I thought my campaigning was finished, certain."

"Three poor fellows have found watery graves, I fear," I added.

"*Caramba!* yes," ejaculated the sergeant, whose teeth still chattered with the fright he had received. "Good fellows, too, they were; but, *Diabolo!* they ought to have known how to swim."

"A mighty bad joke on them, that they couldn't," said Haversham. "I may thank my stars that I learned the art. This is the third time that a knowledge of that delightful and useful accomplishment has extended my furlough in this mundane sphere."

"And the horse, too," added the doctor, "is past all surgery. Santa Maria! What a clean bite el cayman made!"

"A queer time to mention the loss of a horse," said I, testily, for it seemed an insult to the memory of the poor fellows who had perished, to be considering the loss of a paltry beast.

"Not so very queer, after all," returned the doctor, with a long face; "for how are we to return to Angostura?"

"Curse Angostura, and you too for that matter," angrily rejoined Haversham, "and your whole abominable country in addition. Even your rivers swarm with infernal reptiles seeking 'whom they may devour,' to say nothing of gamblers and cut-throats that overrun the dry land like the frogs of

Egypt. Don't talk of returning to Angostura, until we have captured those scoundrels over on the island."

The doctor looked very glum and spitefully toward Haversham at this summary reply, but had the good sense to say nothing.

"I think myself, with the doctor, that we had better give the matter up, for I can see no way to effect our object," said the sergeant.

"Give it up!" cried Haversham, turning fiercely upon him. "Pretty talk, truly, for an officer in the patriot army! Let those four villains over there balk a dozen of us! By St. George, Ned," continued Haversham, turning to me, "we'll have to report this sergeant as derelict in duty, shan't we?"

"But I've lost four men already, and accomplished nothing," whined the sergeant in self-defence.

"Bah! Weren't you sent out here for some purpose?"

"Si, senor, I was, of course."

"You were ordered to arrest Doblado, weren't you?"

"Assuredly."

"Well, ain't you going to obey orders?" continued Haversham.

"But, how can I perform impossibilities?"

"Impossibilities!" exclaimed Haversham, scornfully; "don't call a thing impossible until you have fairly tried and failed."

"And lose more men, I suppose, too," growled the sergeant.

"He, he!" chimed in Okra, "and lose dem dar doubble-doons, too."

The greedy eyes of the avaricious Spaniard emitted a bright light that indicated how sensitive a spot the black's joke had touched.

"Confound the doubloons!" ejaculated the sergeant, with a very poor effort to appear vexed, while he exhibited his anxiety concerning the money, by adding: "They are nothing among so many."

"As for that," said Haversham, now thoroughly disgusted

with the miserly fellow, "you are welcome to the reward for all we care. We wish none of your filthy lucre. A far different motive than a desire for gold actuates us in our endeavours to secure the arrest of this miscreant."

The Spaniard's countenance grew lighter. This last remark of Haversham had greatly mollified him. His apparent unwillingness to make further efforts vanished, and he expressed a desire to aid us to the extent of his abilities in any new plan we might devise.

At this moment we were electrified by the report of three carbines fired in rapid succession by men stationed above the island. There could be but one explanation of such conduct.

The boat was leaving the island !

Catching up a carbine that belonged to one of the dead soldiers, I bade the others follow, and ran at full speed toward the party which had just fired.

"Where is the boat, men ?" I called out as I neared the spot. "Load again quickly, and fire."

"There is no boat in sight, senor captain," was the answer.

"No boat ! *Carajo* ! what in heaven's name were you firing at then ?" I asked, thinking the fellows were only trifling.

"At yon thing, senor ; I don't know what to call it," answered a soldier, pointing with his ramrod out into the river.

There was some kind of a craft floating in the water, but it was not the boat at all. It somewhat resembled a raft, being composed of large logs, covered with green bushes. From the centre arose a large palm-branch with its fan-shaped leaves, evidently designed to answer the purpose of a sail. The gentle breeze that blew off shore was slowly carrying this nondescript craft away from the island. There were no signs of persons on board. We were sorely puzzled what to make of it.

"Blast it !" said Haversham, coming up, "what do you think of that craft, anyhow, Ned ?"

"It's ahead of me entirely," I answered.

"I can't fathom the thing at all," added Haversham, with a shake of the head. "But it's rather mysterious."

"Depend upon it, it bodes no good to us," I continued. "I'm afraid our enemies are aboard the craft, though where they could conceal themselves on it from our sight is difficult to discover."

"Why in the devil should they leave their boat and betake themselves to such a nondescript craft as that?" queried Haversham.

"Load up, men," said the sergeant, "and blaze away at it anyhow."

By this time the men at the lower station had discovered the strange raft, and also opened fire. A continuous volley was kept up for several minutes from both stations. We could distinctly see pieces of twigs and branches flying into the water as the balls struck the craft. Slowly and surely, however, it floated away from us, until I ordered the men to cease firing as they were accomplishing nothing.

A shout from the lower station now attracted our attention. A man was swinging his cap and signaling us. Another object met my eye, which caused my heart to leap with joy.

"By heavens, Haversham, there comes a boat for us," I exclaimed.

Sure enough, a small boat containing two men was nearing the shore, adjacent to the lower station.

"Now is our chance," I shouted. "Forward every man of you!"

My enthusiasm was immediately imparted to the others, and we dashed toward the boat. The soldier whom we had despatched down the stream had found a canoe, capable of carrying a dozen men, which, with its owner, he had impressed into our service. Not more than five minutes were consumed in embarking the men, and with a shout we pushed from the shore.

"Pull together men," I shouted, and obeying my order, we were soon gliding swiftly along, dashing the spray in showers from the bow. We soon passed the end of the island,

whence we had an uninterrupted view of the northern shore. My eyes ran anxiously along the water's edge.

The boat was gone !

There was no longer room to doubt that our enemies had departed, and were probably on board the mysterious craft.

"What have they done with their boat?" asked Haversham.

No one could answer. Perhaps they had sunk it, but why they should do so, and substitute the great unwieldy raft was past divination. The raft was now near the opposite side of the river. We could still reach it by a little extra exertion, as it was propelled solely by the action of the wind upon the broad palm-branch, and, being shapeless for sailing purposes, necessarily made very slow progress.

"Give way lively, men," I ordered, grasping the tiller myself; "we'll catch the villains yet!"

The men bent to the oars with a will, and our fragile craft fairly trembled as we swept through the water.

"Hi! hi! mass'r Capt.," exclaimed Okra, his great eyes opening wider than ever with surprise, as he stood upright in the boat; "what de debbil dat mean? De non'scrip' bust up! He's done gone all to a t'ousand pieces!"

The black was correct. The mysterious craft had separated. Several large palm-logs and a profusion of green bushes were floating upon the water, the sail had disappeared, and a small boat containing four persons pushed out from the *débris* of the raft.

The mystery was explained !

The guerillas had surrounded their boat with several large logs to protect its sides from our bullets, had covered the entire thing with green bushes, and erected a large branch for a sail, secreting themselves in the bottom of their boat beneath the branches, and a favourable breeze had blown them nearly across the stream.

Surprised and enraged at being outwitted, we gave way to greater efforts. Our foes had discovered us, and knowing that their disguise could avail them no longer, they uncovered the boat and seized the oars.

Now came the final struggle. Both parties plied the oars with great rapidity. We were slowly gaining upon them.

"They will reach the shore before we overtake them," shouted the sergeant. "Fire, men!"

Three of the soldiers raised their carbines and fired.

The balls struck the water near the boat.

"Try again, men, quick!" roared the sergeant, much excited, as he began to discover the hundred doubloons slipping through his fingers. Again they fired. Several balls struck the boat. The aim of one of the soldiers proved better, and a man rolled from the boat into the water.

"Hurrah!" I shouted, "now we have them. Pull bravely, men!"

A blinding smoke arose directly in front of me, followed by a loud report. The frail canoe trembled from stem to stern.

"*Santissima Maria!*" screamed a voice of agony, "I'm killed, I'm on fire!"

A puff of air scattered the smoke, and revealed the cause of the shock and the piercing screams. One of the soldiers in his haste to load and fire had dropped a bit of burnt wadding into his powder-flask, which was lying in the bottom of the canoe. The result was an explosion that had blown his hand to atoms, and unluckily for us had also shattered the side of the boat to such an extent that the water began to come in rapidly.

It was now apparent to me that all further pursuit of the foe was useless, as the other boat was near the shore, and it would require all our energies to return to the south bank of the river while our canoe was still able to float. With much chagrin, therefore, I gave the order to return. There was no opposition, as our desperate situation was apparent to all. As we turned our bow southward, an exultant shout of defiance from the guerillas came floating across the waters, and I ground my teeth in silent anger, vowing fearful revenge in the future, should the villain Doblado ever cross my path.

We soon reached the shore, two men being kept busy

bailing out the boat with their caps. It was now past noon, and the heat of the sun was intense. There was nothing left us to do, except to return on foot to Angostura; and bidding our sergeant adieu, whose duties lay in another direction, we started for the city, Okra trotting ahead of us upon the remaining horse, for the purpose of procuring help to remove the carriage.

Late in the afternoon we arrived at our quarters, foot-sore, weary, and disappointed at the unsuccessful and queer result of our first duel in South America.

CHAPTER IV

DOBLADO IN HIS TRUE CHARACTER.

Mal.—By heavens! we'll burn the castle to the ground,
And in its ruins bury all its inmates.

Alasco.—Sir! let us fight like men, in the fair field.

Strike where our liberties demand the blow—

But spare, where only cowards would inflict it.

Mal.—Too magnanimous, my lord.

Alasco.—Nay, do not hold that maxim! Of all traitors,

The worst is he who stains his country's cause

With cruelty: making it hideous in

The general eye, and fearful to its friends.

—OLD TRAGEDY.

“CARAJÓ! who dares dispute my authority? If any one says aught against my will, I'll give his mangled flesh to carrion vultures, and the winds of heaven shall bleach his bones upon these rocks. He shall be accursed for ever.”

This furious imprecation, uttered in a voice hoarse with passion, was spoken by a powerful man, the central figure of a crowd of dark-visaged and swarthy desperadoes. They were assembled upon the broad surface of an elevated mountain plateau. The time was one week subsequent to the events narrated in the last chapter. In the rough voice, harsh features, and flashing eye of the exasperated speaker, we recognize our quondam acquaintance, Captain Doblado.

The animated scene presented a picture for the pencil of the artist. The motley group were clothed in costumes of

the most variegated and picturesque appearance. Some wore the loose, buff-coloured breeches and green jackets trimmed with yellow, so common in Spain and her provinces. Over the shoulders of others were thrown the scarlet and blue ponchos, or flowing mantles, the pride of the dwellers in the vast pampas. Others were dressed in close-fitting garments of gray, with tall, conical-shaped hats, sporting immense broad brims. Heavy whiskers and fierce moustaches predominated.

There were a hundred individuals, comprising all shades of colour, from the ruddy Anglo-Saxon to the jet-black features of the native African. Their weapons, which were of a uniform character, consisted of a short carbine, a dagger in the belt, a pistol, and pouches for ammunition. The leader wore a doublet of dark cloth, slashed with red, a low-crowned, slouched hat, and high-topped boots with yellow facings. A heavy cavalry sabre, and a pair of silver-mounted pistols completed his outfit.

The day was drawing to a close. The red sun was slowly sinking behind the tops of the distant hills, casting a flood of golden and saffron-hued light over the landscape, while far away beyond the intervening fields and palm-groves sparkled the wavelets of the broad Orinoco, as its waters flowed grandly and peacefully toward the ocean.

The sudden outburst of ill-temper on the part of Captain Doblado, with which this chapter opens, was attributable to certain mutinous expressions dropped by his lieutenant, Gaspar Gomez, in relation to a projected expedition then under contemplation.

While a majority of the guerillas had no compunctions of conscience as to the character of the operations in which their strength and skill were to be employed, there were a few who, not being able to perceive how the cause of the Royalists could be promoted by a warfare upon non-combatants, and by constant robberies and wanton murders, frequently manifested an indisposition to take part in those expeditions which belonged to the latter class. Their objec-

tions, however, had never assumed so open a form as upon the present occasion. The captain had assembled his command and notified them that an expedition was on foot to visit the hacienda or estate of a wealthy planter, who was known to be an ardent patriot. Anticipating the usual scenes of pillage and robbery, Gaspar had ventured to expostulate in a mild tone with the captain upon the propriety of these proceedings. The captain replied curtly, and harsh words followed, ending in the fierce threat with which this chapter opens.

"By St. Jago," returned the lieutenant, spiritedly, "I protest against any repetition of these disgraceful scenes. They are a foul blot upon the arms of Spain."

"Ha! open mutiny, is it? By the holy mass, we'll see who is leader here," roared Doblado, the hot blood crimsoning his face. "Arrest the rebel dog, and convey him to the dungeon!"

There was a stir among the men, but no one seemed inclined to lay hands upon Gaspar, who was a heavy-built, powerful fellow, and moreover somewhat of a favourite.

"*Miles demonios!*" yelled the captain, stamping his foot with rage as he beheld the evident disinclination to obey his order. "Are ye all cowards? Sergeant Rodrero, I command you to arrest Gaspar Gomez."

Thus directly addressed, the sergeant had no resource left but to obey. He advanced toward Gaspar to execute the order. The latter threw himself into a posture of defence, and the sergeant hesitated.

"Infernal cowards! White-livered whelps!" cried Doblado, now maddened beyond all control, as he himself rushed upon his lieutenant. Gaspar stepped back, and the next instant the swords of the two men were crossed in deadly conflict. The guerillas stood aghast at the sight, and held their breath in anxious suspense. Stroke followed stroke with the rapidity of lightning. Every thrust was successfully parried. Doblado possessed much more skill in the use of his weapon than his antagonist, while Gaspar

made up in superior physical strength what he lacked in skill. Gaspar was comparatively self-possessed, but the captain was beside himself with rage. It was doubtful which would be the victor. A sharp snapping sound was heard. Gaspar's sword had broken near the hilt.

"Die, villain!" hissed the captain, as perceiving his advantage he lunged ferociously at his opponent.

Gaspar sprung aside with great agility, catching the point of the captain's sword upon the basket of his own weapon, while with his left hand he planted a ponderous blow upon the side of the captain's head. This sudden change of tactics upon Gaspar's part produced two instantaneous results. Doblado dropped to the earth like a felled ox. His men with a shout of "foul play," rushed upon Gaspar and bore him to the ground, where his limbs were quickly pinioned.

While the captain was recovering his lost breath and sense, Gaspar was hurried away with many a kick and cuff to the dungeon. This place, dignified with the name dungeon, was eminently worthy of the designated title. It was a dark, square chasm in the rocks, some twelve or fifteen yards in depth, and six or eight in diameter, strongly resembling a large water-tank or cistern. It was situated some distance from the entrance of an extensive cavern, which the guerillas often used for a rendezvous, and for the storage of the plunder obtained from their frequent raids into that section of the province. The sides of this chasm were perpendicular and quite smooth. Formed by some convulsion of nature, it afforded a suitable place for the incarceration of insubordinate guerillas and captives. Into it the light of day seldom shone, while its walls were moist with the damp of ages.

As there was no possible chance for a prisoner's escape, Gaspar's limbs were unbound, and he was very unceremoniously lowered by a lasso into the loathsome place, there to await the further orders of his enraged and discomfited leader, who would, doubtless, upon his return from the expedition, gratify his revenge in a cruel manner.

Having thus disposed for the present of his rebellious

lieutenant, the captain and his band mounted their horses, and slowly descended the mountain road until they debouched upon the open plain, when, putting their animals into a brisk trot, they rapidly pursued their journey.

* * * * * * *

We will now turn our attention to the hacienda, the destination of the guerillas.

The estate or plantation of Don Felix de Montessa was situated some two or three leagues south of the Oronoco. It was one of the largest and richest in the province, under a comparatively good state of cultivation, and devoted mostly to the production of sugar, coffee, and tobacco. The hacienda was a one-storey building, built principally of *adobes*, or sun-burnt bricks. A portico ran along the entire front of the building. A large hall extended through the centre of the house, separating the family apartments from those of the servants. The former consisted of four rooms—one general sitting-room or *salon*, and three sleeping chambers. On the other side of the hall were a dining-room, kitchen arrangements, and sleeping apartments for the domestics.

Some three hundred yards from the hacienda were the barracoons, or negro quarters, consisting of a long row of low, palm-thatched cottages. To the rear of and adjoining the main house was a flower garden, enclosed by a low thorny hedge.

Late in the afternoon of the day upon which our chapter opens, there were three persons assembled within the sitting room of the hacienda. Reclining upon a lounge covered with soft Cordova leather was a venerable looking man of a lofty martial bearing. His form was finely proportioned, and his features were well defined in firm lines, indicating courage and an unbending will. There was, moreover, an aristocratic character impressed upon his person, incident to the pure blood of Castile. This was Don Felix, owner of the estate. He was an ardent Republican, and physical disability, produced by old age, alone prevented him from taking up arms in defence of his principles. Possessing great wealth, he

contributed freely of material aid to the cause of liberty. His wife had died years before, leaving him two sons and one daughter. His eldest son was now serving in the armies of the Republic. The second, a mere youth of nineteen, but possessed of a noble, chivalric nature, had two years before fallen on the bloody banks of the Apure, offering up his tender life a willing sacrifice upon the altar of liberty.

The daughter was sitting near her father. She possessed extraordinary beauty. She was slightly above the medium height, with a clear white complexion, large black eyes of languishing softness, and lips that vied with the ruby. A wreath of rich, glossy black tresses added infinitely to the loveliness of her appearance. Her delicate fingers were engaged upon a piece of embroidery work, in which she was assisted by a bright-looking waiting maid, who sat at her mistress's feet, upon a low ottoman covered with crimson velvet. The maid was a mestizo, sprightly and vivacious, with fine form and agreeable features.

"What an unhappy state our poor country is in!" remarked the daughter, looking up from her embroidery work.

"Truly, a sad state; but I think a better day is about to dawn upon us soon," replied Don Felix. "Our forces are meeting with some successes now, and I learn, furthermore, that the long-promised aid from England has arrived at last."

"Have the troops actually arrived?" inquired the daughter eagerly.

"Yes, some fifteen hundred, under command of Sir William De Courcey."

"A valuable assistance," said the daughter. "The brave fellows, to cross a thousand leagues of sea to help us fight our battles! I love them already," exclaimed the enthusiastic girl.

"You are joyful, Inezella," remarked Don Felix.

A pause ensued. Inezella's fingers flew rapidly. An hour or more passed in pleasant conversation.

There was a sound of footsteps in the large hall, followed

by a quick, energetic knock upon the door. Zala, the waiting-maid, responded to the summons. It was Ramon, the principal overseer, or manager of the estate. He was a small, active man, very shrewd, honest, and devoted to the interests of Don Felix. He removed his sombrero, bowed very low, and said :—

“Can I speak with Don Felix ?”

“Certainly. Come in, Ramon,” said the Don, in a mild tone.

“My communication is of a private nature, senor,” returned Ramon in an anxious voice.

The Don arose and stepped into the hall. After he had closed the door, Ramon continued :—

“There are a number of strange horsemen in the *quebrado* (ravine), senor, and I deemed it best to inform you of it.”

“Strange horsemen ?”

“Si, senor.”

“Who are they ?”

“Guerillas, probably,” answered the overseer.

“Scarcely. They have not visited this side of the great river this season at all.”

“Who do you think they are then, senor ?”

“*Per Dios*, Ramon, that’s just what I’d like to know.”

There was a pause, when the Don continued :—

“How learned you this ?”

“From two of our people.”

“Did they see them ?”

“Si, senor, and came directly to tell me.”

“Who were these men that informed you ?”

“Mesa, the mestizo, told me,” replied Ramon.

“Where is he now ?” asked the Don.

“He is in the *corral* with the cattle.”

“I must see him. Go for him.”

“Si, senor.”

The mestizo was speedily found.

“Tell me exactly what you saw, Mesa,” said Don Felix.

“Si, senor,” began the servant, removing his sombrero,

and coughing to clear his throat. "Me and Jose had been down to de lagoon, huntin' for som' ob de cattle, wot's been lost. Well, as we cum 'long by de r'vine, we see'd a hull lot ob g'rillas. Dey had stopped to rest, s'pose."

"Had they horses with them?"

"Si, senor, a hull drove on 'em."

"Why do you think they are guerillas?" asked the Don.

"Cos, senor, dey had on dem yaller breeches, un Gem tall hats, just like um g'rillas had wot I saw'd hung at 'gostura onct."

"How many were they at the ravine?"

"Can't say, 'zactly."

"How many do you think?"

"Well," said Mesa, pausing and scratching his head, "I spec', senor, dar be a t'ousand ob 'em."

"A thousand!" exclaimed Don Felix, a smile of incredulity gathering upon his face. "Why, Mesa, that is impossible."

"Well, mebbby only a hundred, senor; I's not good in figgers."

"Quite a reduction, truly, my good fellow," said the Don laughing. "Are you certain there were even a hundred?"

"Hi! hi! senor," chuckled the mestizo; "me sure ob dat, anyhow. Hundred, *sartin*."

"Had they any arms?" asked Don Felix.

"Hab any arms?" repeated Mesa, his eyes winking rapidly, and his honest face wearing a sorely puzzled look, as if in great doubt as to his master's meaning. "Hab any arms? Why yes, senor, ob *course* dey did! Ebery feller, 'cept one brack cuss dat had one cut off."

"You don't understand me, Mesa," said Don Felix, greatly amused at the servant's simplicity, while Ramon laughed outright. "I meant to ask if they had any weapons of warfare with them?"

"Weapons ob warfar'! No, senor, dey had nuffin' wid dem 'cept carbines an' big knives. So dey had—'cept de capt., and he hab sword."

"Did you see the captain?"

"Si, senor."

"Did you ever see him before?"

"Si, senor, me t'ink so."

"When?"

"'Bout year or so 'go," answered the mestizo.

"Where was it?"

"On dis plantation, senor."

"On my estate here?"

"Si senor."

"Who in heavens is he?" asked Don Felix, anxiously.

"Him be de feller wot bot de tobacco, and wot we druv off de 'state and chucked into de hoss-pond," said Mesa.

"*Caramba!* you don't mean that it was—"

"Si, senor. It was Capt. Dubble-da-doo!" interrupted the servant.

"Doblado, you mean, Mesa?" asked the Don.

"Si, dat's w'at I sed."

"Great God, can it be?" exclaimed Don Felix, in tones of some alarm. "It does not seem possible, though. What say you Ramon?"

"That it is not he at all. Every nigger on the plantation sees that villain by day and by night. He is a perfect bugaboo to these superstitious fellows."

"I do not think Captain Doblado is in this region at all at present," said Don Felix; "but we had better send out trusty scouts to ascertain the truth. If half Mesa says is true, we have reason for alarm."

"I will despatch two men immediately," said Ramon.

"Do so," replied Don Felix.

Two trusty vaqueros were ordered to mount their horses, and ride cautiously in the direction of the ravine, and report as soon as possible the result of their observations. Ramon watched the movements of the horses until they disappeared in the bright moonlight, and then paced the ground beneath the shade of a tall alcornoque-tree, awaiting the return of his messengers.

"I didn't want to alarm the Don," he soliloquised ; "but I'll wager the best mule on the plantation that Mesa is right, and that we shall have a visit before morning from that infernal villain Doblado. And a precious lively time we'll have of it too. We must resist to the last, if we lose every nigger on the estate. *Caramba!* it will go hard with Inezella if the scoundrel should get the better of us, for they say he has a penchant for handsome faces."

He continued his walk for a time, and then resumed :—

"I'll look to things myself."

He entered the hacienda, and taking up a small oil lamp, passed through the apartments assigned to the domestics until he reached a heavy oaken door, which he unlocked and entered.

It was a miniature arsenal. Not less than thirty carbines, and a few old Spanish muskets, stood upon a rack made for the purpose, while several tin canisters of powder and ball were lying upon a shelf, which ran along the wall.

After a few minutes spent in examination, he concluded that the arms were in a reasonably good condition, and retired, closing the door after him.

He next proceeded towards the barracoons, roused up the negroes, and assembled every available man and boy capable of bearing arms. He informed them that they would doubtless be attacked by guerillas before morning, and expected them to do their duty, and they should receive valuable presents and extra rations for the next month. The majority announced their willingness to stand by their master and defend the hacienda, while those who at all hesitated were soon brought up to the fighting point by a liberal distribution of *aguardiente*.

A clatter of hoofs announced the return of the vaqueros.

"Any news?" inquired the Don, who had come out to meet them.

"Si, señor; there are g'rillas in the *quebrado*."

"How many, think you?"

"Forty-eight," was the answer.

"Forty-eight? How can you speak so definitely?"

"We counted them, senor."

"Were you so near them?"

"Si, senor," replied one of the men.

"How was it?"

"We left our horses in the palm-grove near the lagoon, and crept carefully toward the *quebrado*. We soon reached a point from which we obtained a view of the ravine, without being discovered. The g'rillas had kindled a fire, and were broiling meat upon the coals. We counted forty-eight, when, perceiving signs of breaking up camp, we regained our horses and returned."

"Do you think they will visit us?" continued the Don.

"Can't say, senor; but I think they mean mischief, for they were all well armed."

"What think you now, Ramon?" asked the Don, turning with a troubled look toward the overseer.

"We will see them, 'fore daybreak, senor," replied Ramon.

"Do you really think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"Well, we must prepare for them."

"Exactly."

"Barricade the hacienda, and make a vigorous defence," said Don Felix, the martial fire of early days beginning to show itself.

"What will you and Inezella do!" asked the overseer.

"What did a Montessa ever do when attacked, but stand and give as good as he got?"

"But Inezella—" continued Ramon.

"Her own room is as safe as any place that I know of," returned the Don.

"Si, senor, if we drive off the villains, she will be safe in the hacienda; but if not—"

"*Peste!* Ramon," interrupted the old Don. "We can whip twice forty-eight such villanous renegades as these."

"Time is precious, senor."

"Enough! Let us to work," said Don Felix, as he entered the hacienda to inform the inmates of the anticipated troubles.

Inezella, nothing daunted by the alarming intelligence, at once, with the chivalric spirit of her race, engaged actively in assisting, to the extent of her ability, in placing the hacienda in a state of defence, and encouraged all by her bold spirit and example.

Two servants were stationed down the road to give prompt news of the nearer approach of the guerillas, while the others aided in preparations for the siege. Many and willing hands made light work. The windows were hastily barricaded with rough board shutters, loopholes being left for carbines, while huge bales of tobacco were rolled into the hacienda from the out-houses, and piled against the doors at each end of the great hall.

Two blacks, armed with carbines, were stationed at each window, and the remainder, with Ramon and Don Felix, were assembled in the hall. The lights were all extinguished, save one hanging-lamp in the hall, and a single wax candle in the room occupied by Inezella and her maid.

These temporary defences were scarcely completed when the sentinels returned, announcing the approach of the guerillas up the road. The troop soon made its appearance, their bright carbines glittering in the clear moonlight. Dashing up at a rapid gait, they halted in front of the hacienda. Everything in and about the building wore such a look of undisturbed repose, that the guerillas began to imagine their surprise was complete.

Two troopers dismounted, and advancing to the door, dealt it a succession of knocks that resounded throughout the entire hacienda.

"Who is there?" asked Ramon, in a sleepy tone of voice, after a moment's delay.

"Friends."

"What do you want?"

"Admittance."

"What for?"

"Open the door, senor."

"Rather not," answered Ramon.

"We will break it down, if you don't."

There was a pause, and apparently a short consultation going on within the hall.

"Come, hurry up," urged the guerillas; "or down goes the door."

"You can't do it," returned Ramon, in a defiant tone.

There was a pause, and the men returned to their friends.

"By St. Peter!" exclaimed Doblado, "does the Don defy us thus! Forward men, and force an entrance."

The entire troop now dismounted, and fastened their horses to a row of palm trees. A score of them sprung forward to obey their leader's command. They reached the edge of the portico.

There was a sudden gleam of red light from the transom over the door and the windows adjoining. The sharp report of a dozen carbines awoke the echoes of night, and five guerillas fell, two of them with ounce balls buried in their brains.

A howl of agony arose from the wounded, and the crowd fled precipitately.

"A good beginning," exclaimed Don Felix.

"I'll burn six wax candles to my lady of San Stephano, the first time I visit Caraccas, for another such chance," said Ramon, in high glee over the successful repulse of their enemies.

The guerillas were evidently much surprised at the reception they met with, and were talking together in loud tones and with vehement gestures. In a few moments they divided themselves into four squads and separated. They intended to assault each side of the hacienda simultaneously.

"Watch closely now, men," said Don Felix; "be cool and fire low."

A yell from the assailants, and a rush from all sides, was the answer the Don received. To their exceeding great

regret they found the windows closed against them, and several more were added to their list of wounded.

“ *El demonios !* ” roared the fiery captain, maddened beyond all control by the unexpected and determined resistance offered him. “ By all the furies, we’ll tear the house down over their heads. ”

He withdrew his men into the garden, where the hedge and the broad-leaved trees concealed them from the view of the besieged.

An hour passed. No further demonstrations from the guerillas. What did it mean ? Had they given over the attack ? Evidently not, for their beasts in charge of a few of the party were still beneath the shade of the palm trees.

The suspense was soon relieved.

A dozen balls, composed of some inflammable material which burned furiously were suddenly hurled from behind the hedge upon the palm-thatched roof of the servants’ apartment. In a moment the dry roofing began to smoke and burn.

“ Fire ! fire ! ” screamed the domestics.

“ Water ! bring water ! ” shouted Ramon. “ The devils have set fire to the hacienda. ”

His orders were promptly obeyed, and the fire extinguished, but not until quite an aperture was burnt, and two blacks were shot by the guerillas as their heads appeared above the roof. More balls were thrown, but the energetic Ramon foiled all their efforts to fire the roof successfully.

Silence ensued again. The moon went down. Darkness spread over the face of nature, and offered advantages to the guerillas which they were not long in embracing. No longer exposed to the unerring fire of those within the hacienda, they could mature their plans with greater deliberation.

“ *Madre de Dios !* ” exclaimed Ramon, rushing into the hall with intense alarm depicted upon his countenance, “ we are out of powder ! ”

“ Out of powder ? ” asked Don Felix, hurriedly, a feeling

of despair creeping into his heart. "How can that be? We had six canisters."

"We have powder left, but—"

"But what? speak quickly," interrupted the excited Don.

"It is *wet*?" said Ramon.

"Who wet it?"

"In our efforts to extinguish the flames, we unfortunately saturated the ammunition chest, until its contents are worthless."

"Santa Maria," groaned the poor Don, "then I fear we are indeed lost."

"Something may yet occur in our favour" said Ramon encouragingly.

"How much powder have the men?" asked the Don.

"Only one or two rounds each."

"Let them use it carefully, then."

The sudden trampling of many feet upon the gravel-walk interrupted this conversation and announced a new attack.

"God protect thee, Inezella," murmured the Don, as he grasped his sword more firmly and encouraged his men.

A volley from the besieged did not seem to retard the advance of the foe. They reached the portico. A huge log of timber, used as a battering-ram, was dashed against the door. It flew from its hinges. An opening was effected. The bales of tobacco proved ineffectual in checking the entrance of the guerillas, and a desperate struggle commenced in the great hall. Few shots were fired, as the besieged had no ammunition, and the others no time to load.

Sword in hand, the Don led on his men, and strove to drive back the guerillas. With clubbed carbines the devoted blacks boldly assaulted them, while the sword of the heroic Don clove the heads of several ruffians, even to the shoulders. Ramon, with his long, thin rapier, thrust vigorously right and left. Thus vigorously assailed, the guerillas wavered and slowly retreated toward the door, when a new danger startled the besieged.

While the main assault was directed against the front door,

as just described, Captain Doblado with a dozen picked men had succeeded in effecting an entrance through the aperture burnt in the roof, and at once began a fierce attack upon the rear of his opponents. Thus hemmed in, further defence was useless, and many of the servants threw down their arms and cried for quarter.

Don Felix, perceiving the hopelessness of their case, disappeared through a side door, leading to his daughter's apartment, followed by Ramon. They had scarcely closed the door after them, ere it was burst open, and Captain Doblado, with a half-a-dozen men, entered the room.

Donna Inezella was upon her knees before a marble statue of the Virgin Mary, clasping to her bosom a tiny golden crucifix. Her maid was crouching near for safety, while interposing their persons between the females and the intruders stood Don Felix and Ramon.

"Back, ye cowards," fiercely cried Don Felix. "Do ye war on helpless females?"

"Assuredly not, senor Don Felix," replied Doblado, coolly, "we love helpless women. It is only their foolish defenders that we war against."

"Villain," hissed Don Felix between his compressed lips, as he rushed upon the captain, "touch my daughter at your peril."

"Oh, old age is impulsive, is it?" sneered Doblado, as he parried the thrust of the enraged parent.

But few blows were exchanged. The aged noble was no match for his athletic adversary, who disarmed him in a moment and hurled him heavily to the floor. A ball from Ramon's pistol grazed Doblado's temple, and buried itself in the opposite wall. In an instant, he too was overpowered.

Inezella had swooned as her father fell. The aged Don was still sensible, although bleeding profusely.

"Shall I run him through?" brutally laughed one of the guerillas.

"*Caramba!* no," sneered Doblado. "If he had enough life in him to enjoy it, I think I'd duck him in the horse-

pond ; but as he is too far gone to appreciate that, I think we'll hang him."

The words were scarcely spoken before a lasso was noosed around his neck, thrown over a lamp hook in the ceiling, and the body of Don Felix swung from the floor.

Donna Inezella soon recovered from her swoon, but appeared as one bereft of sense. Overwhelmed with the sad calamity overshadowing her, she lay in the arms of Zala, moaning hysterically.

Day was just breaking in the east. The horses of the guerillas were heavily laden with booty. Everything that they could not transport was destroyed. A pack-mule was provided and the two females placed thereon.

The incendiary torch was applied to the fine old mansion, and as the red jets of flame and showers of sparks shot up into the heavens, completing the work of devastation, the guerillas mounted their horses and set out upon their return.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE WING.

Then, quick ! we have but a second,
Fill round the cup while you may ;
For Time, the churl, hath beckon'd,
And we must away, away !

—MOORE.

"St. GEORGE for ever," gaily shouted Haversham, as, all excitement, he burst into my room at the "San Marco."

"Marching orders at last, Ned."

"The deuce, you say," I exclaimed, rising and giving my friend a grasp of the hand. "Capital news ! When do we leave ?"

"Orders say Friday morning at seven o'clock," said Haversham, who, as his eye rested upon the golden locket lying open upon my table, continued : "By Jove, Ned, you seem infatuated with that lady's picture. Always poring over it. Not in love, eh ?"

"Never having enjoyed that ecstatic state of the feelings

which you term 'falling in love,' I am not competent to answer you understandingly upon that point," I replied, with a philosophical air.

"Heigho, never in love!" ejaculated Haversham; "tell that to the marines, Ned. Why, I've been in love with some pretty face monthly, ever since I cut loose from the apron-strings. Never in love! Why I'd die outright in a week, without some charming piece of dimity whereupon to set my tender affections."

"You have a reputation for fickleness, I believe," said I.

"It's infinitely mean in you to say so," grumbled Haversham; "you never had a warmer or more steadfast friend than I have been."

"That's true, Haversham," said I, with a softness in my voice, for I loved him as a brother. "I only jested, and take it all back."

"There, that's just like me," exclaimed Haversham, drawing a note from his pocket. "I came mighty near forgetting what I came for. Read that."

The note ran as follows :—

"Plaza de Angostura.

"My DEAR ELLESMERE,—We have received marching orders. The troops move up the river day after to-morrow. I have received permission to visit my family for a few days, and join the army at a certain point of its advance. You must go with me. We will have a gay time. Haversham declares I may count on him. Let me know your decision at once. Remember that I won't take 'No' for an answer. We start this evening. My company of lancers will go with me.

"Yours very truly,

"LUIZ."

"You'll go, of course?" said Haversham, as I finished reading the note.

"Yes, if Sir William will consent," I answered.

"Read that," quietly replied Haversham, drawing forth a second note from his pocket. I read it aloud :—

“Head-quarters British Legion, Angostura.

“This may certify that Captain Edward Ellesmere, A.D.C. on my staff, has a furlough for six days, at the expiration of which time he will report to me in person.

“SIR WILLIAM DE COURCEY,

Gen. Commanding.”

“Why, Haversham, you’ve left me nothing to do,” said I, with a laugh. “You are quite a model of promptness, I see.”

“Nothing left but to pack your traps and be off.”

Don Luiz, the writer of the above note, was a young Spaniard of noble birth, commanding a company of lancers in the patriot army. First brought into contact with him in the discharge of official business, his genial temperament, winning manners, and genuine politeness won my admiration. Our official acquaintance had rapidly ripened into friendship. Much of my leisure time since our arrival in Angostura had been spent in his company, until we had come to regard each other in the light of intimate friends. With joy, therefore, I accepted the kind invitation to accompany him to his plantation, and anticipated therefrom much pleasure.

Just as the clock in the tower of the church of San Michael struck three, our cavalcade rode out of the Plaza, and we bade farewell to the fair city of Angostura. Our retinue presented a very dashing appearance. At the head of the company, riding abreast, were Don Luiz, Haversham, and myself. We were mounted upon spirited horses that pranced and curveted in anticipation of once more snuffing the bracing air of the plains.

No more gallant cavalier ever bestrode a steed than Don Luiz. He was tall and comely, and magnificently dressed in the rich uniform of a Spanish cavalry officer. Over his shoulders hung an elegant *manta* of pure white, and exquisitely embroidered, which served the double purpose of ornament and protection against the fierce rays of a tropical sun. The bright scarlet uniform of the “British Legion,” which both Haversham and I wore, afforded a brilliant contrast.

One hundred Llaneros, riding four abreast, followed. Each man wore the universal red and blue poncho, high-topped boots, and dark slouched hat, or *sombrero*; while their arms consisted of a lance, a *trabuco*, or light carbine, and a sword.

The Llanero of South America is the finest horseman in the world. Inhabiting the vast plains, or *llanos*, his life is spent in the saddle, and he entertains the greatest affection for his horse. In the words of Victor Hugo, "He would not fight but on horseback; he forms but one person with his horse; he lives on horseback; trades, buys, and sells on horseback; eats, drinks, sleeps, and dreams on horseback." Hardy, vigorous, athletic men, inured to danger from birth, they have no superiors as cavalry.

This fine company of men, recruited among the wild plains and cattle-farms south of the Apure river by Don Luiz himself, and armed and equipped at his own expense, were to be a source of the greatest pride. They had followed him through many a rough campaign, and were devotedly attached to his fortunes.

As we dashed rapidly along the "Calle Real," with a clatter of hoofs, ponchos flowing in the breeze, and a thousand gleams of sunshine glinting from polished lances and rebreches, we created quite a sensation. From many a latticed window and cottage concealed amid vines and shrubbery dark-eyed *senoritas* waved their snowy-white kerchiefs in token of farewell.

Our route lay along the southern bank of the Orinoco. The road, which would have been difficult for wheeled vehicles, was passable for cavalry, and we trotted along merrily.

Along the right bank flowed the broad river in silent grandeur. Upon the banks were groups of huge lizards, basking in the sunshine. So wary, however, were they, that they invariably slipped into the water on our approach. Occasionally an immense crocodile appeared floating upon the surface like a log; *toninas*, a species of fresh-water porpoise, spouted jets of water into the air like miniature whales.

Ever-verdant meadows extended far as the eye could reach. Shady groves of broad fan-leaved palms invited to repose, while frequent clumps of laurel and other balsamiferous trees skirted the road. Leguminous trees, bearing immense pods, from one to three feet in length, presented a strange appearance to the eye. Thickets of acacias, the *manirito*, with its delicious pulpy fruit, the lemon-coloured *madrona*, interspersed with the bright scarlet berries of the *paujil shrub*, gave variety to the scene.

As we came upon more stony or gravelly soil, we found the thorny mimosa growing in great luxuriance.

Occasionally we passed coffee, sugar, and indigo plantations ; but owing to the unsettled state of the country, many of them were not in a thrifty condition.

The cool, refreshing breeze that blew from the river, added to our enjoyment as we rode briskly onward. Night comes on rapidly in the tropics ; but a clear sky and bright moon induced us to prolong our ride far into the nocturnal hours. About midnight, as our horses began to show signs of fatigue, and the moon sunk into the western sky, we drew rein, and made preparations to encamp for the balance of the night.

The place selected was a grassy spot at the edge of a palm grove. The horses were picketed in the grove. We lunched on *tasajo*, or jerked beef, *arepas*—small corn-cakes, corresponding to the *tortillas* of Mexico—washed down with a draught of *guarapo*, a pleasant beverage made from the juice of the sugar-cane. We threw ourselves upon the ground, with our saddles for pillows, and a poncho for a covering.

Although much fatigued with the afternoon ride, it was impossible to compose myself to sleep. The handsome features of the portrait constantly flitted through my brain. The wildest visions of beauty that haunted my youthful days fell far short of the surpassing loveliness of this unknown face. It possessed for me a strange, weird fascination, that I had no power to resist. It was my vision by day and my dream by night ; I was infatuated. I was desperately in love with my unknown charmer.

Who was she ?

I would have given worlds to know. How could I find her ? That I could not divine, although I solemnly vowed to travel the wide world over in the search. There was no doubt of her Spanish origin. This fact, however, did not indicate her probable residence with sufficient definiteness to satisfy my anxiety. Nor was the fact that I obtained the locket in Venezuela any proof that the fair owner was a native of this clime. That Captain Doblado knew the owner did not enlighten me upon the subject, for he was a roving character, and might have obtained the miniature as well in Spain or Mexico as in South America.

What relation could possibly exist between this scoundrel and the beautiful unknown ? Thank God ! he said once that he hated her more than me. They are, therefore, bitter enemies. Strange complication ! I felt intuitively that the captain, this female, and myself had a destiny closely interwoven, and I awaited with the utmost impatience its fulfilment.

The mysterious future ! How it is hidden from mortals ! I, that I could tear away the veil that shrouds it ! But destiny is imperative and inexorable, and we must abide its march and consequences. Chafing under these reflections, which would not yield to any philosophising, I determined to show the portrait to Don Luiz on the first favourable opportunity that presented itself. A vague hope possessed my mind that he might assist me in some possible way to discover the original of the portrait, and the soothing influences of this frail hope quieted my excited sensibilities to such a degree that I fell into a slight slumber.

We broke camp before the dawn of day, and pushed forward, expecting to reach our destination by ten o'clock, or on at latest. The road soon diverged from the river and struck into the interior. The scenery much resembled that of the previous day, except that the face of the country was more uneven, and the number of small streams increased. Beautiful little lagoons or lakes frequently appeared, sur-

rounded by vine-clad trees, and abounding in ducks and other aquatic birds.

An occasional *pulperia*, or wayside inn, was passed, offering accommodation of evidently a not very inviting character.

The country was sparsely inhabited, the population being mostly gathered near the widely-separated ranches and haciendas.

We conversed freely, Don Luiz enlivening the journey by graphic sketches of the history of the country, and narrating interesting incidents of his own adventurous life ; in return for which, Haversham and I spun yarns of our campaigns in foreign parts.

"Do you see that tall balsam-tree, yonder?" asked the Don.

"Yes," I replied.

"From that point we can see the hacienda whither we are journeying," continued he.

"Glorious!" cried Haversham, "for I'm getting considerably tired of this long-continued equestrianism. I'd rather march on foot."

"No accounting for tastes," returned Luiz, laughing. "For my part, I'd rather ride than eat."

"What's that?" asked Haversham, as we halted over a scarf lying in the road. I raised it with my sword and handed it to Don Luiz, who exclaimed:—

"By heavens, it's my sister's scarf? *Madre de Dios*, bloody, too!"

"Strange! what means it?" said Haversham.

"And the road is torn up with horses' tracks," I remarked.

"*Santissima Maria!*" groaned Don Luiz, in great agony, "there has been foul work here, I fear. Forward, men."

We put spurs to our horses, and rode rapidly forward, our minds disturbed with fear and anxiety.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE TRAIL.

We swear to revenge them ! No joy shall be tasted,
The harp shall be silent, the maiden unwed ;
Our halls shall be mute, and our fields shall lie wasted,
'Till vengeance is wreaked on the murderer's head.

--TOM MOORE.

We reached the crest of the hill. *The hacienda was not there !* In its place was a heap of smouldering ruins, and blackened, half-charred timbers.

"*Oh, gracious Dios !*" groaned Don Luiz, in a tone of unutterable agony, scarcely able to retain his seat in the saddle, "what a calamity is here ! My father ! Inezella ! Inezella !"

We dashed at headlong speed down the descent toward the ruined hacienda. The smoking embers, the trampled lawn, and broken shrubbery testified of wanton outrage.

Throwing himself from his horse, Don Luiz ran about the ruins like a madman, alternately vowing vengeance upon the perpetrators of the deed, and calling by name upon his father and sister.

Unable to console him, we remained silent but anxious spectators of his anguish. Suddenly a thought seemed to strike him, and turning he ran at full speed toward the baracoons, which the guerillas had left unharmed. He burst open the nearest door and entered ; but in a moment reappeared, swinging his sombrero and calling us to him.

On entering the room, we found Don Luiz bending over the form of a venerable-looking man, reclining upon a rude couch. They were clasped in each other's arms, and uniting their tears and sobs. The person thus embraced was Don Felix. In a corner of the room lying in a pool of blood, was Ramon, the overseer. He was still alive, but weak from excessive loss of blood.

"Water, for the love of God, water !" he gasped, in scarcely audible tones. Water was quickly brought in a calabash, and the overseer drank freely. Its reviving effects were soon apparent. He sat up, and pointed out his wounds, which were

soon bandaged. The Don, though not able to sit up, was apparently not severely injured, a bad gash upon the forehead being the only serious wound.

"Thank God, your life is spared, dear father," said Don Luiz, as soon as the hurry of the occasion had somewhat subsided. "But where is my sister?"

The parent groaned and covered his face with his thin hands. As it was with the greatest difficulty he could speak at all, he turned to Ramon, and motioned him to tell us of the disaster that had so unexpectedly befallen them.

Ramon in a brief manner narrated the events of the day previous as we have already described them, and continued:

"The guerillas left me bleeding and senseless upon the floor of Donna Inezella's chamber. I soon revived, and saw Don Felix suspended by a lasso from a hook in the ceiling. With much labour and difficulty I succeeded in severing the cord, and he fell heavily to the floor, cutting that frightful gash in his forehead. The bleeding therefrom, however, restored the circulation in his veins, and he revived. Having bound up our wounds as well as we could, we lay quietly upon the floor, almost helpless, and fearing a return of the villains, whom we heard carousing and plundering in other parts of the hacienda. Finally they departed. We crawled into the main hall. A crackling, snapping sound was heard, accompanied by a noise as of distant roaring. The building was on fire! The flames spread rapidly, and we barely reached the garden when the roof fell in with a crashing sound, sending a cloud of sparks and cinders heavenward. After repeated and wearisome efforts, we reached the shelter of these baracoons."

"But my sister, Inezella? you say nothing of her," interrupted Don Luiz, in accents of such sorrow as made my heart ache.

"Alas, Don, we know nothing of her fate," said Ramon, sadly. "She was in the chamber when I last saw her, but when I revived she was nowhere to be seen. In all probability, Captain Doblado carried her off with him."

“Captain Doblado! *Milles tonitres*,” shouted Don Luiz, springing to his feet in an ungovernable passion, and seizing Ramon by the shoulder. “Did that outlaw perpetrate this outrage? Speak!”

“Even he,” answered Ramon.

“Great God!” groaned the Don, covering his face with his hands. “Poor Inezella! What a fate!”

My friend seemed overpowered by the alarming intelligence that his beloved sister was in the hands of this unprincipled and reckless desperado. Suddenly starting up, Luiz clutched the hilt of his sword convulsively, and exclaimed—

“*Per omnes Dios!* thou shalt be avenged, Inezella!”

He became apparently composed, spoke a few words of comfort to his parent, and ordered two men to remain with the wounded and look after their necessities. He then addressed the overseer—

“Which way did these villains go?”

“Toward the river, whence they came.”

“How long since?”

“They left about five o’clock.”

“*Diabolo*, and it’s now ten! The guerillas have five hours’ start,” ejaculated Don Luiz; “but, as they are heavily laden, and move slowly, I think we can overtake them speedily.”

“They carried away everything,” said Ramon.

“How many were there?” asked Luiz.

“About fifty at first. I think they returned with a dozen less, at least.”

“I shall at once pursue,” said the Don, turning to me. “Will you aid me?”

“Yes, Don Luiz, to the last drop of my blood,” I answered.

“*Caramba!* I’m dying to have a shot at Doblado himself,” ejaculated Haversham, “and I’d go a dozen leagues to get it, too.”

“Let us proceed, then,” said Don Luiz, as he bent over the

prostrate form of his venerable parent and imprinted an affectionate kiss upon his brow. "We will restore you Inezella, dearest father. Rest easy. Farewell."

Don Luiz announced to the Llaneros his determination to follow the guerillas. They received this information with shouts of applause, and a twirling of lances that boded no good to their enemies, should they be so fortunate as to overtake them.

"Tot we'd got to journey's end, mass'r Capt.," said Okra, with considerable surprise, as I bid him tighten my saddle-girths and remount his horse.

"We are starting on another one, Okra," I said. "We are going after Captain Doblado."

"Hi ! hi ! Dubble-da-doo agin ? What's he bin an' done now ?"

"He has burnt the hacienda and carried off Don Luiz's sister."

"De debbel !" ejaculated Okra, his mouth expanding into a grin, and exposing a magnificent array of ivory. "He be bigger cuss dan I tot he was. Stole a woman ! Faugh, he's wusser dan a brack nigga !"

Haversham and I could not suppress a laugh at Okra's ideas of Doblado's character.

In a few moments the troop was mounted and on its way. The numerous tracks leading toward the river were a sufficient indication of the route pursued by Doblado, and we dashed rapidly along in the pursuit.

After leaving the hacienda a league to the rear, the roads forked. The road leading to the north-east was the one over which we had passed early in the morning ; the other turned off to the north-west. This latter was the one taken by the guerillas.

"How far is it to the river ?" asked Haversham.

"Half a league to the ferry," replied Don Luiz.

We again relapsed into silence.

The sparkling waters of the river soon flashed upon our sight. We approached the bank.

The ferry-boat was gone !

We looked at each other in surprise and perplexity.

"*Caramba !*" ejaculated Don Luiz.

"Cunning devils," said Haversham. "They have used the ferry-boat, and then properly sunk it."

Don Luiz was lost in thought, and doubting what to do.

"Plunge in and swim the horses across," suggested Haversham.

"Have you forgotten the last time we tried that experiment, and the result of it?" said I.

"Rather think not," laughed Haversham. "I was too badly scared to forget it so soon ; but Mr. Cayman couldn't eat but a few of us this time, and we must cross, you know."

"Suppose you were one of the few?" said I.

"I'll stand my chance with the rest," replied Haversham, jocularly. "I don't think my danger is imminent, for 'the man that was born to be hanged'—you know the adage."

"Shall we swim across?" I asked Don Luiz.

"Swim across !" he answered, with an exclamation of surprise. "*Santa Maria*, it would be certain death to half of us at least. The river is a quarter of a league wide, and swarms with crocodiles."

"What then can we do?"

"Go to the ferry above," was the answer.

"How far is it?"

"Half a league."

"Three miles in all out of our way," said I.

"And an hour's time lost," remarked Haversham.

"There is no help for it," said Don Luiz.

We turned our faces westward, and galloped on in silence.

We reached the ranche of the *canoero*, or ferryman, and to our joy found his boat in good condition. It was only an uncouth, flat-bottomed scow, propelled by paddles, vigorously plied by himself and a pair of half-grown sons. It required considerable time and several trips to take our party to the opposite side. However, by exercising patience, and encouraging the *canoeros* by the sight of a handful of

glittering reals, and stimulating them with copious draughts of *aguardiente*, we accomplished the transit in safety. Several ferocious-looking caymen, who watched our movements with a hungry look and an ominous snapping of sharp teeth from the wake of the boat, did not escape our notice ; and I involuntarily felt thankful that we had not been so foolhardy as to attempt a passage by swimming. We soon regained the road we had left, and our horses, somewhat refreshed by the delay in crossing, were pushed on rapidly.

It was now noon. There was little wind stirring, and the air became very hot and oppressive. The guerillas, doubtless, not fearing any pursuit, had taken no pains to conceal their route, which was easily discovered by the multitudinous tracks left upon the road by their horses.

A league from the river, the surface of the country became uneven, and increased rapidly in roughness as we approached the mountain range that now loomed up in the distance.

"What's that?" ejaculated Haversham, reining in his horse.

A broken junk-bottle lay in the road.

"*Santissima!*" joyfully cried Don Luiz. "The villains are not far ahead."

"How do you know that?" asked I.

"They probably dropped that bottle, which broke as it fell, and they did not stop to pick it up," replied the Don.

"Well, suppose they did—it may have been hours ago," said I.

"No, that cannot be."

"Why not?"

"If much time had elapsed, the sun would have dried up the contents of the bottle, but the earth is even yet moist around it."

I admired the shrewdness of the Don's reasoning and admitted its cogency. Again we spurred on our beasts, full of hope, dashing along the road, which now wound round the foot of the mountain range.

“Whar am de tracks, mass'r Capt. ?” asked Okra.

There were no longer any tracks upon the road before us. We had not cared to watch the ground closely, and had not noticed that the track of hoofs had ceased to be visible.

“*San Juan!* we’ve lost the trail,” exclaimed Don Luiz, with a look of perplexity. “We must turn back and find it.”

The troop which had halted, now began to retrace their steps, examining carefully to discover the point where the trail had been lost. Finally, at a point where a broad, shallow stream, flowing rapidly over a smooth, pebbly bottom, emerged from a ravine and crossed the road, we obtained the desired information. The trail coming up the road from the Oronoco, was lost upon the left bank of this.

“El Diabolo!” said Don Luiz, “the scoundrels have taken to the water.”

“Gone up this ravine?” I asked.

“Yes, or down the stream,” said Haversham.

“More likely up-stream,” said Don Luiz.

“Why so?” asked Haversham.

“Well,” replied the Don, “in the first place, to follow the stream south would simply be to return toward the Oronoco, whence we came; and secondly, the ravine leads into the mountains where they would be more secure in their retreat, and so I think they have gone up this stream.”

“Well, we’ll soon see,” cried Haversham, dashing boldly into the stream. The water, which rose only to the horses’ knees, was clear and cold, and the bottom of the stream was quite smooth, so that the change from the hot, dusty road was delightful, especially as a refreshing breeze blew softly down the ravine.

Steep rocks covered with vines and running creepers arose like walls on both sides. After proceeding a few rods the stream turned from its onward course, and wound abruptly around a rocky ledge. We had scarcely passed this ledge of rocks, when we discovered a smooth bridle-path, which left the right bank of the stream, and extended by easy ascent up a ravine, running at right angles with the stream.

The path was of sufficient width to permit two horsemen to ride abreast, and had the appearance of being much travel-worn.

The body of a dead horse lay at the water's edge. It had been shot, and the blood curdling in little pools, and the carcass scarcely yet cold, told of recent death. The bridle and saddle were still upon the beast.

We were now evidently approaching the rendezvous of the outlaws, and caution was necessary.

We halted for consultation.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MOUNTAIN FASTNESS.

Hark! the horn of combat calls -
Ere the golden evening falls,

May we pledge that horn in triumph round!
Many a heart that now beats high,
In slumber cold at night shall lie,
Nor waken even at victory's sound.

—MOORE.

He loves—but knows not whom he loves,
Nor what her race, nor whence she came;
Like one who meets in Indian groves,
Some beauteous bird without a name,
Brought by the last ambrosial breeze,
From isles in the undiscovered seas.

—IBID.

We sat upon our horses in the middle of the stream.

There was a look of deep anxiety and disquietude upon the countenance of Don Luiz. Haversham had drawn from his case a cigar, and was puffing incessantly, as if to induce thought. As I cast my eyes up the ascending bridle path, and viewed the surroundings, I became satisfied that we had a difficult task before us.

A dozen men, warned of our approach, and properly stationed, could defy successfully a regiment of soldiers. Therefore, there was need of excessive caution in any further advances we might make. Haversham seemed to have arrived at the same conclusion, for he removed his cigar from his mouth, emitted a cloud of light-blue smoke, and turning toward us spoke:—

"A confounded tough place that to storm, if the rascals make any attempt at defence."

"We can never ascend that path by mere physical force, against the will of the guerillas," I replied.

"*Caramba!* no, senor," added Don Luiz; "we must take them by surprise, if we hope for success."

In this decision we all agreed.

"Besides," continued the Don, "if we cannot drive them into close quarters, and cut off their retreat, they will assuredly carry off Inezella with them when they fly. Moreover, we are ignorant of their strength. They may outnumber us greatly for aught we know, as they are now within reach of reinforcements, doubtless."

"Why not send forward scouts to examine the path?" I suggested.

"A good idea," said Haversham; "I'll go for one."

"*Caramba!* no, indeed," interrupted Don Luiz, "we can't spare you; but I have two men whom I will send. They are used to such business, and I would match them for cunning against all the devils in the mountains."

He called out from the ranks two Llaneros, who were the very antipodes of each other in their outward appearance. Pedro was a tall, stout fellow, with light hair, heavy features, and of powerful strength. Nuna was short and spare, but very active and wiry, with black hair and eyes, and apparently a very shrewd little fellow.

"You will leave your lances, carbines, and horses behind," said Don Luiz, addressing them, "taking with you only your knives."

"Si, senor captain," replied the men, respectfully.

"You will ascend that path, and ascertain whither it leads, and whether there be any guerillas near us. Exercise the utmost caution, and in no case permit the enemy to discover you. We will await your return."

The scouts at once commenced the ascent. They moved slowly, Nuna in the advance, keeping a keen look-out for anything suspicious. They were soon lost from our view. No

signs of the enemy were discovered. A few horse-tracks only were seen, which was not to be wondered at, as the path was over a stony foundation. After proceeding a short distance, the path grew more level, and finally terminated upon a broad piece of table-land.

As the scouts emerged carefully upon this plateau, the distant neigh of a horse struck upon their ears. They halted, and exchanged looks of satisfaction.

"Did you hear that?" whispered Nuna.

"Yes, it was a horse," replied Pedro; "but a great way off."

"*Peste*, no; it is near by."

"It was too faint to be near."

"No. These rocks broke the force of the sound," said Nuna.

"Then we must go slowly for awhile."

Sitting down upon the rock they conversed awhile in low whispers, when at length Nuna began to crawl upon all fours toward a rocky ledge that abutted upon the plateau. Reaching this, he was followed by Pedro. By means of shrubs and vines they slowly clambered upward.

This ledge was crowned with a thicket of thorny mimosas, through which the two men made their way with great difficulty, frequently being obliged to cut away and remove entire shrubs with their knives to facilitate their progress. Suddenly, Nuna, who was in the advance, gave a sign of warning to Pedro, and they both knelt upon the ground. Nuna placed his ear upon the surface of the rock, and remained in that position for several minutes. He then began to creep forward again with much caution, Pedro remaining stationary. A few rods were traversed in this manner, when he again dropped down, and began to work his way backward.

"*Santos*," he whispered, "the devils are just ahead of us!"

"How many?"

"Fifty or more."

"What are they doing?"

"A little of everything, I guess," was the reply. "It's a mighty promiscuous sort of a crowd."

After a few moments of hurried consultation, the scouts crept forward to obtain a better view. Beyond the rocky ledge upon which the scouts were concealed, was a broad ravine, through which ran a small streamlet. The mouth of this ravine opened upon a part of the plateau which Nuna and Pedro had just left previous to climbing up the ledge. Along the bottom of this ravine were the brigands.

Their horses were picketed near by, while the guerillas were reclining in various postures, resting themselves from the fatigues of the expedition. Some were gathered in groups playing cards, others were lunching on *tasajo* and *arepas*, while others were getting boisterous over their *aguardiente*. They evidently had no fears of pursuit or surprise, as no indications of sentinels were seen, and their carbines were stacked near the stream.

On the opposite side of the creek, beneath the shadow of a mimosa bush, were seated three persons—Inezella De Montessa, Zala her maid, and the guerilla chief. The captain was evidently making some proposition to Inezella, which she repelled with scorn, weeping all the time. Zala was sitting close by her mistress and holding one of her hands, encouraging her in her refusals.

Captain Doblado rose to his feet, and shaking his clenched fist at the females, was about to depart.

"*Per Dios!*" whispered Pedro, "I'd give my horse to have a crack at that scoundrel yonder, threatening the *senorita*."

"Or one thrust of my knife," added Nuna.

After a few moments' longer delay the scouts began to feel their way back, which they accomplished without discovery.

"*El Demonios,*" whispered Don Luiz, rising in his stirrups, as the scouts detailed their information; "and Inezella is there?"

"There were two females, *senor*," replied Nuna.

"The elder one with dark hair and eyes?" hurriedly asked the Don.

"Si, *senor*."

"*Gracias Dios!* it is she beyond all doubt," exclaimed Don Luiz.

"By St. George! you're a trump," said Haversham, delighted, as he gave Nuna a thump on the shoulder, "if you are a little fellow."

"Si, senor," replied Nuna, as he winced beneath the heavy hand of Haversham, well pleased at the compliment, though he but half understood its import.

We now made preparations to attack the camp of the guerillas. Deeming it good policy to leave our horses behind, as they would be comparatively useless, and as a single neigh from them would suffice to alarm the enemy, the entire troop dismounted, and the animals were left in charge of half-a-dozen Llaneros.

The rest of us slowly began the ascent, Nuna acting as guide. Arriving upon the edge of the plateau, we again came to a halt. Twenty men, under lead of Pedro and Nuna, were ordered to ascend the ledge and conceal themselves among the mimosa bushes. Upon hearing a carbine discharged, they were to fire a volley into the ravine and assault the guerillas upon the flank. Meanwhile, the rest of the party were to advance along the plateau toward the mouth of the ravine, and make a simultaneous attack upon the enemy's front. We hoped by these means to surprise and overwhelm the robbers without much difficulty. Pedro and Nuna were, moreover, directed to push forward vigorously after the first volley, and prevent the carrying off of the females, should it be attempted.

At this important juncture of affairs occurred an unlucky accident that, as the sequel will show, was peculiarly unfortunate. The last of the Llaneros under Pedro had nearly reached the top of the ledge, and our party was just on the eve of advancing to the assault, when the Llanero missed his hold upon a shrub, and rolled backward down upon the plateau, his carbine striking against a rock and being discharged. The report reverberated loudly from rock to rock, and reached the guerillas.

All hope of a complete surprise vanished.

"Forward men, quick," shouted Don Luiz, leading the main troop in person.

In a moment we were under way, and dashed toward the mouth of the ravine, trusting to Pedro to do his part to the best of his ability. On reaching the opening of the *quebrado* another surprise awaited us. A barricade of rocks and trees, which had escaped the notice of the scouts, extended across the ravine, and prevented our further advance.

The report of the Llanero's carbine had given warning to the robbers of danger at hand, and although not fully prepared for so vigorous an attack, they nevertheless offered stout resistance at this point. A score of carbines were discharged at us as we emerged from the plateau and came in full view of the barricade. Twice that number replied from our side, and a dense cloud of smoke so filled the ravine, as to conceal both parties for a few moments. Several of our party fell, either killed or wounded.

"There is no barricade where the stream flows through," shouted Haversham, swinging his sword and drawing a pistol from his belt.

"That is our point, Don Luiz," I exclaimed, excitedly, for my blood was now up, and I felt ready for anything.

"Follow me, Llaneros," cried the Don, as he plunged into the stream, the waters of which were about two feet deep, and ran with a strong current.

As the smoke lifted, threescore men were wading up the stream, loading and firing as they advanced. The guerillas gave us another volley, and rushed towards the edges of the stream to dispute our passage. The opening in the barricade, toward which both parties were tending, was about six yards in width.

The next instant we were engaged in a hand-to-hand encounter in the middle of the stream, the swift current carrying away and dashing against the survivors the bodies of the dead and wounded. My eye was searching for the tall form of Captain Doblado. He was not to be seen. The leader of

the guerillas was a short, fleshy villain, with a fierce expression of countenance, and a profusion of bushy red hair, who kept up the most appalling yelling I ever heard. He had the lungs of a Stentor, and uttered a profusion of oaths that would have made a sea-pirate blush for very shame.

"What a devilish howling that brute keeps up," said Haversham. "The villain actually makes me nervous."

"Shoot him," said I.

"May I always be on half-rations, if I haven't fired at him three times already," growled Haversham.

"Can't you spot him?" I asked.

"No! blow me; I think I've got a bead on him, when he utters one of those infernal yells, and so disarranges my nerves, that I invariably miss the whelp."

"I'll try him one shot," said I, as I took deliberate aim at the villain's bushy head.

"He's squat dis time, *sure*, mass'r Capt.," chuckled Okra, who was at my side all the time.

Sure enough the red-headed scoundrel had disappeared.

"*Lous Deo!*" screamed Haversham with delight. "Now we can fight like Christians since that devilish yelling has ceased."

Just then a sharp firing was heard from the ledge; with a shout, Pedro and his men attacked the guerillas upon the left flank; they gave us a parting volley, and scattered in various directions, taking shelter behind rocks and trees upon the sides of the ravine, and keeping up a desultory firing.

A junction of our two parties was now made. We had not yet discovered the females; nor, indeed, had we seen Captain Doblado.

From the chief's absence from the fight, I at once inferred that our plans for the recovery of Inezella and her maid had miscarried.

"Where is my sister?" asked Don Luiz, rushing up to Pedro.

"I cannot say, *senor*."

"Haven't you seen her?"

"There were no females in sight when we reached the brow of yon ledge," replied Pedro.

"*Madre de Dios!*" exclaimed Don Luiz; "can that villain have escaped with her? Is all this blood spent for nothing?"

"Not so," said I. "Those scoundrels are not concentrating over there without an object."

"I wager my life," said Haversham, "that Doblado is somewhere on yon hillside yet, where the ruffians are gathering."

"There is an opening in the rocks like a cave," said Pedro.

"*Caramba*, yes," said Luiz, "and a villain has just entered."

"That is their stronghold, and there we shall find the females," added Haversham.

"Then we must take it," said Don Luiz.

"'Twon't take long to do that," continued Haversham, "for your Llaneros fight magnificently. By Jove! with ten thousand such fellows, I could march from Calais to Marseilles and back again."

The guerillas kept up a constant scattering fire upon us all this time, and it was proposed that we should withdraw behind a clump of trees until further measures were decided upon. From this point we replied occasionally to the fire of the guerillas, which was not severe but very annoying. Don Luiz, Haversham, and myself withdrew a little way from the troop, and held a short consultation. I was leaning against the trunk of a small alcornoque tree, with my sombrero in my hand. I felt a quick, sharp blow, a heavy cloud of darkness seemed to cast its shadow over me, and I sunk unconscious upon the ground.

A stray ball from a guerilla's carbine had struck my left breast. When I recovered my senses, I was lying upon the ground, my head supported by Don Luiz, who was bathing my temples with cold water from the stream, while Haversham was kneeling at my side fanning me with his sombrero, much agitated.

"Thank God ! he lives," ejaculated the poor fellow, who was nearly frantic over my misfortune, as I opened my eyes and sighed.

"How exceedingly fortunate," said Don Luiz, "that it so happened. It is the hand of God."

I turned a bewildered look upon him, as I endeavoured to comprehend his meaning, and said : "Fortunate that I have been wounded ! It is not a mortal wound, is it ?"

"No, no, thank God," said Haversham, in joyful tones : "you are not hurt much, only stunned."

"It saved your life though," remarked Don Luiz.

"What saved my life ?" I asked, sitting up, and regaining my strength rapidly.

"This miniature, which, in searching for the wound, we found in your breast-pocket," said Don Luiz.

"What say you ?" I asked eagerly, as I felt the hot blood mounting to my temples.

Don Luiz held up to view the diamond locket which I prized so highly. I took it in my hand, but could not open it, as the spring had been broken by the guerilla's ball.

"I trust the picture is not injured," I said. Then turning to Luiz, I continued—"You can open it with your knife."

"The portrait of your affianced, eh ?" asked the Don, laughingly, as he proceeded to insert the edge of his blade beneath the broken spring.

"Your supposition is wrong," I answered. "She is not my affianced, though I worship her—in fact, I have never seen the original at all."

The spring snapped, and the locket opened.

"*Mulre de Dios !*" exclaimed the Don, with a look of utter bewilderment and surprise, as the opening case revealed to his gaze the lovely features of the portrait. "Where, in the name of the blessed Virgin, did you get this ? Speak, speak quickly, senor."

"The story is too long to tell you now," I replied, as the crimson hue spread rapidly over my face. "Do you know her ?"

“Know her? By all the saints in the calendar, I think I do.”

“Who is she?” I asked eagerly, my heart beating with increased rapidity.

“*Santa Maria!* don’t you know?” replied the Don.

“No, as I hope for heaven,” I replied.

“*It is the portrait of my sister!*”

“Inezella!” I ejaculated, trembling with emotion.

“Si, senor, my sister Inezella.”

“Found at last, thank God!” I exclaimed, overwhelmed with joy and surprise, as I sprung to my feet, forgetting my weakness and everything else in the tumultuous whirl of emotions that swept over my brain at this happy discovery. “As you value my friendship, Luiz, don’t mock me with false hopes.”

“Mock you, Ellesmere, heaven forbid! Dearest sister,” continued the Don, pressing his lips again and again upon the precious locket, as if he would devour it in the excess of joy which its recovery enkindled. Suddenly he paused, and his brow grew somewhat darker and sad as he turned and addressed me in slow and deliberate tones, that evinced much and deep feeling—

“You said, Edward Ellesmere, that you worshipped this lady, who proves to be my sister. You have never seen her, but I trust you soon may have the opportunity. If your love for her proves a pure and holy affection, I have nought to say; but beware, senor, for if you trifle with her, heaven help you!” He paused, and then, as if repenting of his harsh tone, he grasped my hand warmly and said: “Forgive me, Ellesmere; I spoke harshly. I can trust everything to your honour. Let it pass.”

“If it please you, senor captain,” said Pedro, advancing, scabrero in hand, “the guerillas are getting bolder by our delay, and have just wounded Nuna and killed another man.”

“*Par Dios!*” exclaimed Luiz, “we are indeed wasting time. Keep the locket now, Ellesmere, and we will hear the

story again. Let us at once to business, which your fall interrupted. What course shall we pursue?"

"The villains won't stand a vigorous charge," said Haversham, who was always in favour of blows rather than strategy. "They are badly frightened already, and a bold dash would put them to flight instantaneously."

"But that is just what we don't want," said Don Luiz. "For then they will carry off my sister with them."

"Our plan must save her, or it's not worth trying," I said, energetically. "We must have her, if we cut the windpipe of every loon on the hillside yonder."

"What is your plan?" asked the Don.

"Well," replied I, "I think Haversham's plan a good one, provided we follow the villains closely. They can't run and carry off two females expeditiously enough to prevent our overtaking them; so I favour Haversham's plan."

"Perhaps you are right. At all events," said the Don, "any more delay here gives them time to prepare for defence, and to recover their lost wits. Besides, I think we shall find the females in yonder cave, near the group of trees."

A broken ledge of rocks, and two clumps of small trees near the foot of the opposite ascent, offered three secure resting-places, when once reached, from which we could meet the foe on more equal terms. After a short consultation, we divided the troop into three companies, commanded respectively by Don Luiz, Haversham, and myself. A level piece of land lay between us and the opposite hill. While crossing this plain we would be exposed to the fire of our foes, but, once over, the trees and rocks afforded a shelter; as we agreed to pause there for a few moments to regain breath before endeavouring to ascend the hill.

At a given signal we all pushed forward, scattering as much as possible to avoid danger, and again concentrating as we approached the opposite side of the plain. Not expecting us, we were half way across the level space before anything like a well-directed fire was received. The enemy were concealed behind trees, rocks, and hillocks.

Our plan to rest in the shelter of the trees was completely frustrated by the impetuosity of Haversham. No sooner had he reached the spot where he was expected to halt, than, overcome by the ardour of his nature, he waved his sword and shouted to his party :—

“Up the hill, my hearties, and at them !”

The brave Llaneros needed only the word, and springing forward they dashed up the steep ascent. It was a rash undertaking, but Don Luiz and I could not prevent it. In fact, so electrical was the effect of this gallant conduct upon our respective commands, that we were swept along with the men like straws upon the whirling current of a rushing stream.

In an instant the guerillas and Llaneros were engaged in a fierce and close encounter. Few carbines were fired. Knives glistened in the sunlight, and pistol-shots rung out clearly on the air. Powerful men grasped each other, and with arms intertwined, rolled down the hillside into the ravine below, where such as had any strength left, exhausted themselves in further efforts to destroy their adversaries. Some too excited to reload, dashed out the brains of others with their clubbed carbines, and blood flowed like water.

Nothing could withstand the vigorous assault of our men. They swept away their opponents like chaff before the wind. Those guerillas who escaped unhurt turned to fly, but their pursuers were close upon their heels, dealing out fatal blows. We pushed as if by common consent toward the cavern. A half-dozen bandits were putting forth superhuman efforts to roll a huge stone before the entrance, but abandoned their attempt on our approach, and ran into the cave.

We dashed in after them, Haversham leading the way. The sudden exit from bright sunlight into comparative darkness was so blinding, that we were forced to come to a sudden halt. A few moments accustomed us to the change, and, aided by a glimmering light that found entrance through a long narrow crevice in the roof, we pushed slowly along.

The excavation could not properly be termed a cavern, but

was rather a long, narrow, crooked hall, or passage way, lighted dimly by cracks in the roof. We traversed several hundred yards in this manner, discovering no living thing, although an occasional garment or canteen gave evidence of previous occupation. As we turned a corner of rock, we saw at a distance a circle of light, which soon proved to be the termination of the hall or passage way. Emerging from this natural viaduct, we entered at once upon a well-beaten path, leading along the side of a mountainous crag.

A short distance from the outlet of the cavern, we came upon the dead body of a guerilla, lying in the middle of the pathway. He had been stabbed to the heart, and the white ivory handle of a dirk was still protruding from his waistcoat. The moment Don Luiz saw the weapon, he sprung forward and drew it from the wound, exclaiming fiercely—

“*Caramba*, this belongs to Inezella! My sister is near.”

A faint groan was heard from an adjoining thicket of mimosas. In an instant several Llaneros darted into the bushes, and drew forth a female form.

It was Zala, the waiting-maid of Inezella.

She was nearly insensible, and so utterly prostrated and exhausted as to be unable to speak. There was blood upon her face, proceeding from a slight scratch on the forehead.

“*Santissima Maria!*” exclaimed the Don, bending over her, “where is your mistress?”

The poor mestizo, with a look of unutterable misery, shook her head, and endeavoured to raise her hand. The effort was futile, and her arm fell to her side.

“Give her some *aguardiente*,” said Haversham.

His suggestion was followed. Her face also was bathed with the liquor, and she revived and sat up. Again Don Luiz inquired for her mistress. This time, after several efforts, Zala succeeded in speaking faintly—

“Gone yonder,” pointing along the path we were pursuing.

“Alone?” continued the Don.

“No, senor; with the Captain Doblado,” whispered the girl.

“How long since?”

“Fifteen minutes, perhaps.”

“How happened this?” continued the Don, pointing to the dead guerilla and Inezella’s dagger.

“He insulted us in the temporary absence of Doblado, and Inezella killed him in self-defence.”

“By heavens,” shouted the Don, “we have nearly reached them. On, men!”

Full of hope and encouragement, we dashed ahead.

Pedro, who was in advance of the rest of the party, suddenly halted, and threw up his sombrero with a shout.

In an instant we were at his side.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MOUNTAIN STRUGGLE.

Timon—Prithee! what success, my lord?

Hen.—Our success grows apace; each hour but adds
To its accomplishment. Methinks I yet
Shall win the maiden, though ’twixt the present
And such result, be perils both of flood and sword.

Timon—Heaven grant thou may’st.

Hen.—The Fates have so decreed; I feel it in
My very inmost soul. —OLD PLAY.

THE cause of Pedro’s shout was apparent.

Before us lay a broad ravine, at the bottom of which rushed a mountain torrent, between precipitous, rocky banks. Across this stream extended the trunk of a large tree, answering the purpose of a bridge. The stream was here about thirty yards wide.

Crossing upon this temporary bridge, and three-quarters of the way across, was Captain Doblado, bearing Inezella in his arms. Her dress had become entangled in some of the branches, and the guerilla chieftain was endeavouring to tear it loose, that he might proceed. A dozen carbines were instantly levelled at him.

“Hold, men! don’t fire!” exclaimed Don Luiz, in extreme agitation. “You will kill my sister, too.”

“Let me give him a shot,” said Haversham; “I’ll wager

my head that I can put a bullet through his brain, and never harm your sister."

"No, no, *caramba*, *senor*," cried Don Luiz. "If you kill him, he will fall into the stream, and drag Inezella with him."

So evident was this to the minds of all, that while the Llaneros still covered the villain with their carbines, no one dared to fire. The guerilla perceived the movements of our party, but not hearing the conversation, was unaware of our decision not to fire. Fearing instant death, he waved his sombrero, and called out—

"I know you, Don Luiz De Montessa. You have me in your power now, but if you harm me I will plunge your sister into the stream below, where she cannot live a moment. Will you listen to a proposition from me?"

"Speak on, dog of a Spaniard," answered the Don; "but talk fast."

The guerilla ground his teeth with rage at the epithet bestowed upon him, but suppressing his anger, he replied—

"Permit me to cross alone in safety, and ascend yon mountain's side, and I will leave your sister here unharmed."

For a moment silence ensued, the desire for vengeance upon the bandit and anxiety for Inezella's safety each contending for the mastery in Don Luiz's bosom. The hesitation was only momentary, however, for affection triumphed, and he answered—

"I accept your offer. Go now, but beware of the future. I will pursue you to the world's end, and visit upon your foul head the vengeance your heaven-defying crimes deserve."

The guerilla did not pause to reply, but abandoning Inezella upon the bridge, where she supported herself by the branches, he bounded like a chamois up the steep ascent beyond. Impulsively, several carbines were raised, but Don Luiz exclaimed—

"No firing! The word of a Montessa is as good as a bond. Let the villain go this time."

Scarcely had the robber left the log before I sprung forward to have the honour of aiding Inezella to return. I was

half-way across the bridge when a cry of mingled terror and surprise arose from the Llaneros upon the right bank of the stream. I paused to learn the reason, and perceived my friends pointing terror-stricken toward the opposite mountain.

Turning my gaze in that direction, I beheld a scene that froze the blood in my veins, and paralyzed all my nerves. The reason of the bandit's willingness to release Inezella was now apparent. He hoped to save his own life and yet destroy Inezella. Half way up the height, and beyond the reach of the carbines, he had paused. Seizing the stout branch of a fallen tree, which he used as a lever, he had succeeded in starting from its insecure resting-place an immense rock weighing several tons.

The ponderous stone had already started from its bed, and was descending directly toward the log-bridge !

With a yell of defiance, the guerilla watching its descent. On it came with a crashing, roaring sound, like an Alpine avalanche, gathering momentum as it proceeded. I stood rooted to the spot, incapable of motion, holding my breath, and expecting instant destruction, while poor Inezella pressed a golden crucifix to her lips, and murmured an Ave Maria for protection.

The vast stone bounded like a ball from rock to rock, filling the air with flying splinters of tree and rock, as it swept everything before it.

Will it strike the bridge ?

One fiend in human form hopes it will ; while threescore brave hearts are invoking all the saints in the calendar to avert so dire a calamity. We are saved ! The moving body strikes a hillock and deviates from its course. We rejoice too soon, for, reaching a worn channel that terminates opposite the end of the bridge, the rock dashes along it, as unerringly as a locomotive on the track.

"*Gracias Dios !*" A terrific crash—a fearful scream from our friends upon the bank—a cry of exultation from the mountain's side ! Rock, bridge, Inezella, and myself are

precipitated with the rapidity of thought into the abyss of whirling waters beneath.

I arose to the surface unharmed. A dark object swept by me, but in the blinding spray I could recognise nothing. As a drowning man grasps a straw, so I convulsively clutched at this. It was the form of Inezella!

There was no time for congratulation. The wild waters hurried us along. Although a strong man and a powerful swimmer, and induced to every exertion by the hope of saving the life of her already dearer to me than life, all efforts to breast the current were unavailing. The stream dashed along with the velocity and force of a mill-race, and I found I was exhausting my strength to no purpose.

A ledge of rocks jutted out into the rapids. I clutched it with a desperate grasp. For a moment I steadied myself and threw the form of Inezella over my shoulder. I could do no more. A fierce surge of waters loosened my hold, and we again shot down the ravine. Directly ahead of us I saw a small tree growing out of the rocks at the water's edge. We were swept by the seething, boiling current, against the branches of this tree, which were buried in the waters.

Bidding Inezella, who, though very weak and much frightened, was still conscious of passing events, to cling closely to me, I grasped a stout branch with both hands and held firmly to it. My feet, which the force of the current whirled around against the bank below, struck upon a slight projection, and gave me such powerful aid that I felt able to retain my position for some time.

Could our friends reach us in time?

Not long were we subjected to doubt. A shout from the top of the bank, which was precipitous and thirty feet high, announced the arrival of help. I answered back with a wild whoop which rose clear and shrill above the roar of waters.

"My God, they're here!" called out an excited voice, which I instantly recognized as Haversham's.

"Hold fast five minutes, and you're saved," he shouted.

"Lose no time," I answered, "for my strength is failing."

There was a hurried tramping of feet above us, and confused voices, and then Haversham called out again—

"Shall we lower you a lasso?"

"Yes, and hurry."

In an instant a strong lasso, that ever-present convenience of a Llanero, was dangling before my eyes. Releasing my hold with one hand, I endeavoured to slip the noose beneath Mezella's arms, but in vain. My strength was too far gone to retain my position with one hand only, and I was compelled to desist from all such attempts. I threw the lasso from me, and again seized the branch.

"What's the matter?" cried Don Luiz.

"I am too weak to fasten the lasso," I replied.

There was a hurried consultation on the bank. The lasso was drawn up. Again it descended. This time the welcome arm of Okra descended with it, the lasso firmly bound around his waist.

"I'se a comin', Mass'r Capt.," said the generous fellow, whose countenance still wore traces of recent tears, although now wreathed with joyful smiles.

"You are a good fellow, Okra," said I, "and I'll reward you for this."

"Don't say nuffin, Mass'r Capt., not 'nudder word," interposed the noble black, his eyes moist with tears of joy, "I'se so glad to find ye 'gin—t'ank de Lor', mass'r."

"Take the lady gently in your arms, Okra," said I, "and hey will draw you up."

The powerful black raised her in his brawny arms as if she were a child. Willing hands above drew them up rapidly; and a second trip deposited my exhausted frame upon the smooth rocks above. A few drops of *aguardiente* revived us both.

The sun, meantime, had sunk from sight in a bank of dark clouds, and night was fast approaching. Darkness comes on rapidly in the tropics, and it was necessary to decide quickly upon what course to pursue.

"We cannot get out of these mountains before dark," said Don Luiz, "and we cannot remain here."

"Suppose we return as far as the cave, at all events, and then decide," suggested Haversham.

"A good idea," I rejoined, as I rose to my feet and endeavoured to steady myself, "I can easily walk that distance if Haversham will give me the aid of his arm."

"We must carry Inezella upon a litter," remarked Haversham. At the mention of her name, Inezella, who was reclining with her head resting on Don Luiz's shoulder, said,

"I think, brother Luiz, that I can walk."

She essayed to arise, but found herself unequal to the task.

"Do not weary yourself by trying, dearest," kindly interposed the Don.

A rude litter of branches, over which were thrown a poncho or two, was soon improvised, and Donna Inezella was placed thereon. Two stout Llaneros lifted each end, while Don Luiz walked by the side, conversing in low tones with his sister.

Our return was much slower than the advance, and by the time we reached the cave complete darkness so enveloped the earth, that any further progress was out of the question. We therefore halted, and began preparations for the night.

A huge fire was speedily kindled, near the rear entrance of the cave, from the pieces of dry wood and faggots that strewed the ground in great abundance. To our joy, we found Zala in the cave, whither she had crawled after our hurried departure. She was much recovered, and took an active part in assisting her mistress. The night air grew so chilly, that we feared lest the damp clothes of Inezella might cause illness, she being of a delicate constitution. A small fire was therefore kindled within a recess of the cavern, under the personal supervision of Don Luiz himself. This, together with a temporary curtain, consisting of several ponchos, made quite a cozy little apartment, which was devoted to Inezella and her maid. The generous little mestizo, moreover, insisted upon her mistress assuming her

dry garments, she, in turn, with natural skill and ingenuity, making for herself a tasty dress from a couple of ponchos, until her mistress's clothes should dry before the fire.

As for myself, the immersion did me no harm, and the blazing fire soon dried my garments. Under the direction of Pedro, guards were stationed in proper positions, and the rest of the company, after partaking of what little *tasajo* and *aguardiente* remained in their possession, disposed themselves in various comfortable nooks.

Don Luiz, Haversham, and myself, wrapped ourselves in our cloaks and sat down a little apart from the rest.

"A very eventful day," said Don Luiz.

"Stirring times," said Haversham, in reply, as he handed us each a cigar, and continued: "How did you enjoy involuntary baptism to-day, Ellesmere?"

"Not so badly scared as if there had been crocodiles in the stream," I retorted.

Haversham took the joke, and indulged in a hearty laugh over the remembrance of his own adventure in the Oronoco.

"Yes, yes, Ellesmere," interrupted the Don. "Tell us about the locket, now, for I'm dying to hear how you obtained it."

"Oh, I got it from our mutual friend, Doblado," I replied.

"From Doblado?" asked Don Luiz, in surprise. "Why how, in the devil's name, did it come into his hands?"

"*Caramba!* that I can't pretend to explain," said I, smiling.

"Well, then, tell us how you got it."

"I won it from him at a game of rouge-et-noir, when at Angostura. We had a duel, you remember," said I.

"And a mighty queer duel it was too," chimed in Haversham. "One might better call it a general engagement, or a regular campaign for that matter. Instead of Ellesmere and the captain doing up their own fighting, as, being good Christians, they were bound to do, they lugged your humble servant and some twenty others into the affair—a big crocodile included—and a right handsome little scrimmage it

was too—barring always the part that abominable water varmint took in it; for you see, Don, the heathen critter, with no more manners than a Chinese, stuck his nose into business that no way concerned him."

"Impolite, wasn't it?" laughed the Don.

"Rather think it was," added Haversham. "And the beast up and swallowed a horse that cost me twenty pounds, just as easily as Jonah took in the whale."

"You mean as the whale swallowed Jonah—not Jonah the whale," said I, with a hearty laugh.

"Well, perhaps you're correct," replied Haversham, scratching his head; "I'm not quite so familiar with Scripture as I ought to be, but the comparison is just as good anyway—only I wish the horse had swallowed the crocodile, and then it wouldn't have mattered a bit. The crocodile wasn't as honest though by half as the whale."

"How do you make that out?" asked I. "I can't see any honesty or dishonesty involved in either case."

"Well, I can," replied Haversham. "The whale was an honest fish, but the crocodile was a dishonest varmin."

"How does it appear?"

"Now, look here, Ned," answered Haversham, with a broad grin; "if you are good at Scripture, you are dull at seeing a clear point anyhow. You see that Jonah swallowed --no, I mean the whale swallowed Jonah, but the very minute he was convinced he had swallowed the wrong man he threw him up again, so that he could return to his wife and children; but this pesky crocodile don't return the horse."

"I give it up," I said, as we all three burst into a loud laugh over Haversham's logic.

After our merriment had somewhat subsided, I asked Luiz:—

"Was Doblado intimately acquainted with your family?"

"Somewhat so," replied Don Luiz. "Perhaps I may as well tell you briefly how it came about, and why the villain entertains such bitter hatred toward all our family."

"Do so," said both Haversham and myself.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DON'S STORY.

I tell it as 'twas told to me —
A plain, unvarnished tale." —ADDISON.

DON LUIZ stretched his limbs, drew his mantle closer round him, and began:—

"Two years nearly have now elapsed since I first met Captain Doblado. I was at Maracaibo, awaiting the arrival of the steamer from New Orleans, by which we expected my sister Inezella. She had been spending a year in that city at a young ladies' seminary, perfecting herself in the various accomplishments of refined society. At the same hotel with me was the captain, then simply Senor Doblado, who represented himself as the travelling agent of a London firm, for whom he was empowered to purchase large quantities of sugar and tobacco.

"Being at a loss for something to do to while away the time, and the captain having apparently considerable leisure, we quite naturally struck up an acquaintance. We played monte, drank champagne occasionally, and enjoyed ourselves amazingly. The man was very polite in manner, agreeable in conversation, and winning in his ways. Moreover, he negotiated with my father, through me, for several hundred hogheads of tobacco, to be delivered at Angostura.

"I extended to him an invitation to return with my sister and myself to our estate, which offer he accepted, as I had fairerward reason to remember, with apparently great satisfaction, although at the time I not notice it.

"The steamer soon arrived with Inezella. Much to my surprise, I then learned that the captain had met my sister in New Orleans, and had already a slight acquaintance with her. They had met at a *soirée* given by the Spanish consul, and the captain had called upon her soon afterward, apparently much pleased with her.

"She, however, took a dislike to him from the beginning and avoided his society whenever she could do so.

“He had suddenly disappeared, and she had heard nothing of him until she arrived at Maracaibo, on her way home.

“Upon learning these facts, I regretted that an invitation had been given him to accompany us home ; but it was too late to retract without offending the captain, and, as he was likely to prove a good customer for the products of our estate, and supposing that Inezella’s dislike was only a whim of the moment, I decided to drop the subject for the present, trusting to the future to right matters. The sequel proved, however, that Inezella was a better judge of the man than myself.

“The captain remained a fortnight at the hacienda, enjoying our hospitality, until the tobacco was properly packed and ready for shipment down the river to Angostura. Inezella’s dislike to him seemed to increase daily, and in the direct ratio of the pointedness of the captain’s attentions, until I concluded to speak to our visitor upon the subject, unless an early departure rendered such a course unnecessary.

“One afternoon, on my return to the house from a trip to a distant part of the plantation, I found my sister in tears. After urgent and repeated inquiries, I ascertained that Captain Doblado had actually had the impudence to offer himself to her, and had only left the room after repeated refusals on her part to listen to his proposals, and threats to call her maid, unless he withdrew from her presence.

“My anger knew no bounds. This was the return the ungrateful scoundrel was making for all my kindness and hospitality toward him. I was proceeding with rapid strides

his apartment, determined to eject him summarily from the house, when I overheard loud words upon the piazza. I stopped to listen, and recognised the voices of Don Felix and Captain Doblado in violent altercation. I stepped out on the portico. The captain’s hand was clenched and raised as if about to strike my father. Before he was fairly aware of my presence, I gave the villain a powerful blow upon the side of the head, beneath which he reeled and staggered.

"We immediately closed, but the captain was more in my equal in physical strength, and I was likely to be overcome in the struggle, as Don Felix, just recovering from an attack of illness, was unable to assist me. The scoundrel leavoured to draw a dirk from his bosom, to prevent which it required all my efforts. Ramon, the overseer, who was fortunately near at hand, heard the noise of the scuffle, and ran to my aid. We soon had the captain secured and his wrists bound with a thong. I was in doubt what to do with the miscreant, but finally decided. I ordered the entire population of the estate to be assembled, and stated the ungrateful conduct of the captain. I told them how he had wormed himself into my confidence, had abused it, had insulted my sister, threatened Don Felix, and even endeavoured to take my life. I informed them that I intended to punish the criminal, not by taking his life, though in such a case I might be justified; but by disgracing him in the eyes of all present. I then ordered three stout blacks to seize the captain and carry him to the adjacent horsepond and give him a thorough ducking. This the servants did with a hearty good-will, amid the jeers and hootings of the entire plantation. The captain swore furiously, and raved like a madman, vowing all kinds of fearful vengeance; but in vain.

"After the miserable wretch was half drowned, I ordered whips to be given to some twenty of the servants, and bid them drive the culprit from the place, first giving him some good advice, and a warning not to be caught in our neighbourhood again. The dog of a Spaniard at first rebelled, and actually showed fight, but a powerful darkey, grasping him by the collar, gave him such a good shaking, that he begged for quarter. Upon being released, he bounded off across the garden like an affrighted deer, pursued by the servants, who led their lashes most vigorously and successfully, as the continued howls of pain uttered by the wretch fully testified.

"The tobacco had not been shipped, luckily for us, as we soon after learned that the captain was a swindler, and was

in reality purchasing on his own account, and paying there for in forged bills of exchange on London.

"The next time I heard of Doblado, he was a captain in the patriot army at Puerto Cabello, which he doubtless joined for purposes of plunder and revenge. He soon after quarrelled with a fellow-soldier, shot him in a duel, and was dismissed the service. He now holds a captain's commission in the Royalist army."

"As arrant a knave as walks unhung," said Haversham, as the Don concluded his narrative.

"But how did he get this locket?" I asked.

"I think he must have stolen it from my apartment," replied the Don. "The case was originally my mother's, and was manufactured in Florence. It was a present to her, when a young girl from the Vicomte Sismondi, a friend of the family. The portrait of Inezella was painted by an Italian artist in New Orleans, and I prized it exceedingly. Soon after the captain's exit from the hacienda I missed it, but never connected its loss with his departure, until I saw it to-day in your possession, and learned that you obtained it from him."

There was a pause in the conversation. Haversham's hard breathing indicated that he had succumbed to the fatigues of the day, and was fast asleep.

Don Luiz was the legitimate owner of the locket, and I debated in my own mind whether I ought not to return it to him at once. True, he had not asked for it, but that was no proof that he did not expect it. I resolved, therefore, much as I prized it, that the owner should have it, and I drew it from my bosom.

"Here, Don Luiz," said I, handing it to him, "is your locket; I take pleasure in restoring it to its original and proper owner."

Don Luiz gave me an earnest look as he replied:—

"No, Ellesmere, I'll not take it from you. I think you have earned a claim to keep it. Besides you know it preserved your life, and on that account you ought to prize it."

"I do not deny, Luiz, that it would confer great pleasure upon me to retain the miniature, not only as a remembrancer of my own providential preservation, but as a precious memento of the friendship of yourself and Inezella," I replied.

"Then keep it."

"On one condition only can I consent to do so," was my answer.

"What is that?" asked the Don.

"That Donna Inezella gives her free and unreserved permission for me to do so," I continued.

"Keep it then. I will guarantee that," said Don Luiz.

"Pardon me, my friend, I may appear a stickler for technicalities, but her own consent is necessary, which, of course, you cannot give at present," said I.

"How know you that?" asked the Don, quizzically.

"Why, you haven't spoken to her at all yet on the subject."

"Yes, but I have Ellesmere," replied the Don.

"When and where, pray tell?"

"Oh," said Don Luiz, with some indifference, "as the matter was borne hither, we conversed about you."

"About me?" I asked, with no little gratification as well as suspicion.

"Certainly, about you. *Caramba* why not?" said Luiz, with a laugh.

"I did not suppose she was enough interested in a comparative stranger," I answered.

"Pshaw, not think of the man who had just perilled his own life to rescue her! Who, in heaven's name, would she sink of, if not of her preserver?"

"And she knows that I have this locket?"

"Yes. I told her so myself; and added that it had saved our life lately, and that you prized it both on that account and for her sake, too," said the Don.

"Why, Don Luiz, you didn't repeat what I told you to-day?"

"What did you tell me?" asked Luiz, with a smile. "Come, Ellesmere, what's the matter? I declare your face is crimson already."

"Oh, nothing," I replied, striving to conceal my feelings. "You know what I alluded to. On the impulse of the moment, I said to-day that I loved your sister, Inezella."

"Do you wish now to retract that assertion?" asked the Don, his face growing gloomy and sad. "If it was only the exclamation of a passing thought—then, indeed, have I committed a grievous error in informing Inezella of it; but I supposed you were in earnest, and meant what you said."

"You misunderstand me, Luiz," I replied, quickly and with earnestness. "I desire to retract nothing. On the contrary, I now repeat, deliberately, what I said hastily this morning—that I love Inezella, I worship her."

"You relieve my mind greatly," said the Don.

"But you didn't tell her that I said I loved her, did you?"

"Yes, Ellesmere, I did," replied the Don.

"May I ask you what she said?" I eagerly inquired.

"Well," answered the Don, with a yawn of drowsiness, "she said, 'Good soul, let him keep the locket, for he deserves it.'"

The Don gave another yawn, and manifested such unmistakable indications of sleepiness, that I made no reply, but drew my mantle closely around me.

A sensation of exquisite satisfaction and pleasure diffused itself through my mind, as I thought of Inezella, dearer and more precious now than ever, after the late perils undergone in her behalf. Overcome with the fatigues of the past forty-eight hours, my eyelids grew heavy, and the misty shadows of dreamland darkened my weary brain, as I sunk into the embrace of Morpheus. Bright visions of future joy flitted before me, over all of which the ideal object of my love, the fair-faced and dark-eyed Inezella cast radiant beams of ineffable happiness. How long I slumbered I know not, but I was awakened by the sound of approaching voices and the trampling of many feet.

Don Luiz had arisen and was conversing apart with Pedro, the lieutenant. Between the fire and myself were several lanceros, and near them stood a large-framed, dark-visaged man, dressed in a green jacket and buff-coloured breeches, with high-topped boots, and wearing a slouched hat with a black plume. He was unarmed, and apparently awaited the termination of Pedro's conversation with Don Luiz. He was not of our troop, and I began to wonder who he was and whence he came. My doubts were soon dissipated. Don Luiz beckoned to him to approach. The stranger complied with the order, and advanced toward us, hat in hand.

"You say you belong to the band of Captain Doblado," said the Don.

"I did, *senor*, belong to his band this morning, but am no longer a member," replied the stranger, in a firm voice.

"Your name?"

"Gaspar Gomez."

"From your dress, I might suppose you were an officer," continued Don Luiz.

"Si, *senor*, I was his lieutenant."

"Ha! say'st thou so? Why did you leave him?"

"He abused and maltreated me, *senor*. Besides, I am an honest man, and have always opposed the captain's cruelties and robberies. I was formerly a sergeant in the army of Morillo. Six years since we sailed hither from Cadiz. Lately, I was ordered to report to Captain Doblado and assigned to a lieutenancy. I volunteered, *senor*, as a Christian, to fight for King Ferdinand, and not to murder defenceless women and children and sack haciendas."

"You speak fair, my man, and your tongue is smooth," continued the Don, "but answer me one question ere we go further."

"Well, *senor*."

"Did you aid in sacking the hacienda of Don Felix de Montessa?"

"No, *senor*. I opposed that expedition; wherefore I was

thrown into a dungeon, whence your men, hearing my calls for help, liberated me."

"My lieutenant, Pedro, has informed me that you are willing to aid us, in order that you may be revenged upon Doblado; is this true?" asked the Don.

"*Por Dios!* I crave for his heart's blood," responded Gaspar, with a fierce oath.

"Tis well. For had you participated in the ruin of my father's house, and still belonged to that accursed gang, I should hang you in the twinkling of an eye."

"And I should have deserved it," was Gaspar's response.

"The fellow has an honest look and fair speech," said the Don, in a low voice, to me. "Would you trust him?"

"Yes," I replied, "for he can aid us greatly if he is honest; and if he attempts to deceive us, why put a ball through his treacherous skull—that's my advice. Trust him, but watch him."

"I will try you, Gaspar Gomez, and if you serve us well and truly, you shall be at liberty to return to the Royalist army unharmed. But, mark my words, if you are playing us false, and assume this tale to deceive, by all the saints in the calendar, I'll cut your head from your body, and leave you as food for the beasts."

"Pedro! take charge of this man; and, on the first indication of treachery, put a ball through him," continued the Don.

"Si, senor!" answered Pedro, stroking his moustache. "May I stay in purgatory for ever, if I don't do as you bid me."

Again the camp relapsed into silence, and naught was heard save the heavy breathing of the weary sleepers, and the regular, distant tread of the sentinels.

CHAPTER X.

THE RETREAT AND THE FRUITS OF IT.

And.—Oh, they are villains, every pesky wretch—
Practised to stab and smile; to stab the balaie
That smiles upon them.

Wal.—Food only for black powder, my lord.

And.—Powder which, rightly applied, would blow them
To the devil—where they belong. —BROOKE.

THE grey streaks of early dawn found activity prevalent in the camp. The slowness of our advance, impeded as we were by the two females and several wounded Llaneros, would consume several hours in reaching the foot of the mountains.

Our rations were consumed, and we must fast until our horses were reached, which we had no doubt we should find grazing upon the luxuriant herbage along the stream, under the charge of the faithful Llaneros detailed for that purpose.

At the word of command the troop fell into column, the females and wounded bringing up the rear. Don Luiz and Haversham rode in the advance, while the former, who had much regard for my inclination, suggested that I should remain with the ladies. This arrangement was very agreeable to me, and I flattered myself that it was not particularly objectionable to Donna Inezella, whose heightened colour, as I approached, revealed evident satisfaction.

In a voice of great tenderness and earnestness, she expressed to me the gratitude she felt for my interest in her welfare, as proved by the events of the last few days. My reply was checked by the report of a carbine some distance in advance of us. Don Luiz came hurriedly to the rear, exclaiming, excitedly—

“There are guerillas near us. We must move with caution.”

“There can’t be many, I think,” said I, “for we whipped them badly yesterday.”

“I am by no means sure of that,” replied the Don, with anxiety “Pedro declares he saw a large number of yellow breeches among the rocks and trees a few moments ago.”

There was no longer any doubt on the subject. A volley

of balls rattled around us, while banditti started up from behind trees, stumps, and rocks on both sides of the ravine.

"*Diabolo*," shouted Haversham, as he came bouncing up to us. "Where the devil did all these villains come from? There are at least two hundred of them, and as rantankerous and saucy as musketos down at Angostura."

"We must fall back to the cave at once," said the Don. "Do you, Ellesmere, see to the ladies and wounded, while the rest of us give these rascals a check."

Under these directions we began a retrograde movement, the Llaneros skirmishing constantly with the guerillas, who, encouraged by our retreat, grew very bold. We were outnumbered three to one, and fought strictly on the defensive. At length the shelter was reached, and we breathed easier. But we had little time or reason for relaxation. The guerillas, with desperate daring, threatened to assault us in this new position. To our great dismay, Pedro announced that our ammunition was beginning to get low, not more than one or two hundred loads remaining in the entire troop. Our situation now became really alarming, and our capture or destruction seemed by no means impossible.

We could not hold this position any length of time against the superior numbers of the enemy; and we knew of no means of escape except through the ravine, now in their possession. At this moment of our extremity, Gaspar Gomez came forward, sombrero in hand, and said—

"If senor captain will listen to me, I can assist him."

Don Luiz, with a look of satisfaction, which, however, gradually changed into an incredulous smile, replied—

"How can you help us, pray tell?"

"By showing you a way of escape, senor."

"*Santa Maria*, Gomez, lead us out of this infernal trap, and you shall have not only your freedom, but one hundred doubloons besides."

"I want no gold, senor; only trust me."

"Well, then, lead on; but no treachery, or, *caramba*, you're a dead man."

Gaspar grinned, and continued—

“By pursuing the path in the rear of this place in a southerly direction, we shall soon arrive at the stronghold of these guerillas, which is less than a quarter of a league hence. There you can supply yourselves with ammunition and provisions, and make, if need be, a stout resistance. The entire band is in our front now, and the way must be clear.”

“Will not the villains attack us on the route?”

“Impossible. There are only two roads leading hence to their stronghold. The one we pursue is short—the other compasses two leagues, and they cannot scale the mountain range that separates the two paths.”

After a short consultation, we decided to follow Gaspar's guidance and at once took up our journey, leaving half-a-dozen Llaneros at the mouth of the cave to make such demonstrations as might deceive the guerillas and conceal our departure.

After leaving the cave, we took a direction opposite to that pursued in reaching the log-bridge, and moved as rapidly as the circumstances of the case permitted. The path wound along the mountain's side, gradually descending until it reached the bottom of the valley, and then ascended the opposite side.

We had just begun the ascent, when a number of shots were fired in the direction of the cave, and we saw the Llaneros whom we had left behind running down the declivity, followed by a host of yelling guerillas.

Our party was now urged on expeditiously, in hopes of reaching our new place of shelter before we were overtaken. Occasionally a stray shot fell near us, which served to quicken our movements. Gaspar performed his part well, and was fast gaining our confidence, when to our dismay he stumbled, and fell forward upon his face, exclaiming—

“Santissima, I'm shot!”

We raised him up, and found the blood pouring profusely from a wound in the back.

"Leave me and push ahead, I can't live but a moment," he gasped, and overcome by pain and loss of blood, fainted away.

The bandits were now in the ravine below us in close pursuit, and we were compelled to hurry on. We therefore drew the body of Gaspar into the bushes, and pressed forward. The death of our guide appalled us, as we needed now more than ever his directions and words of cheer. We supposed that the path we were treading led directly to the stronghold, but were not altogether certain of this. Moreover, the scattering fire of the pursuers was becoming very serious.

Haversham finally volunteered to take command of thirty Llaneros, and endeavour to check the audacity of the bandits. Stationing his men behind a large fallen tree, he succeeded in checking their advance for some ten minutes, when he was compelled to fall back to prevent being captured.

This momentary repulse was our salvation.

We reached an open plateau, with the entrance to a large cavern in full view before us, which we hastened to enter. After passing the entrance, the cavern increased rapidly in width and height. At the rear of the first vault a narrow passage-way began, extending some half-a dozen yards, when it again widened into a second vault. This second apartment communicated with a third, which latter was entered by an opening from the side of the second one. From the ceiling was suspended a rude metal lamp, which emitted a faint light, and a disagreeable odour of fish oil.

It was a large vault, capable of containing one hundred persons comfortably. The floor was strewn with blankets, various weapons, and several packs of cards, and its general appearance indicated an unexpected and sudden departure of its former occupants. Considerable *arepas* and *tasajo* was also found upon a swinging shelf in the corner, but no ammunition. An opening in the side wall of this apartment indicated additional passages and vaults, but a damp, noise-some air that came up from it forbade our entrance.

The females were at once placed in this inner room, and we cast about for a method of defence. There was no time to be lost, for the ruffians were already swarming over the plateau, evidently half inclined to rush into the cavern. There was this advantage on our side, that, while we from within the cavern could distinctly observe the movements of our foes, we were invisible to them. A dozen Llaneros with carbines were stationed in the first apartment, which disposition had scarcely been made, before the guerillas dashed at the entrance, but started back in terror as the twelve carbines vomited forth a leaden tempest, directly in their faces. Ten bodies lay near the doorway, and the rocks grew red with their blood. The assailants retreated tumultuously a short distance.

Twice this attempt was repeated with the same result ; and the devils appeared as ready as ever to renew the attack, while, to our horror, Pedro announced that our powder was now entirely exhausted. My own pistols were each loaded, and I determined to reserve them as a *dernier resorte*, in case of extreme necessity.

Don Luiz was nearly frantic with the idea that we might yet be overpowered by the guerillas ; while Haversham was ransacking every nook and corner of the three apartments, vowing a dozen wax candles to any saint or heathen god that would enable him to find a few loads of ammunition. Inezella, with Zala at her side, was commending us all to the Blessed Virgin, in whose protective power she seemed to place abiding confidence.

Again our foes showed signs of hostility, but also greater caution. Suddenly the report of a carbine resounded through the cavern, followed by an exclamation of joy.

"He's dun fur, mass'r Capt. I'se kill'd him !" shouted Okra, as he ran up to me, greatly excited.

"Killed whom ?"

"Why, yon debbil of a capt'n, w'at you call um—Dubble-da-doo."

"That is a mistake, I think," said I.

"Yah, yah, mass'r Capt., I shot an' see'd um fall, and see'd um carry um off."

From the commotion visible among the guerillas, it was evident to us that some accident had occurred of a serious nature.

They were hurrying to and fro, and an officer was lying upon the ground at the foot of a small tree, who we hoped might be Doblado, but were not certain thereof.

Our foes were now more furious than ever, and adopted a new plan. Gathering up all the faggots and dry brush they could find, they began to pile them up against the mouth of the cavern. We were to be smoked out!

To this pile they applied a match, and in an instant dense volumes of thick smoke came rolling into our retreat. As the smoke filled the first apartment, it poured into the next, and soon became almost insupportable, so that we were driven for safety into the third apartment.

"*Carrai!*" exclaimed Haversham, "blow me to flinders, if I'm going to be cured like a ham in this way. Let me die like a Christian, or not at all.

With this ejaculation he lighted a lamp and darted into the damp, gloomy opening in the side of the rock. Ten minutes passed, when Don Luiz remarked—

"I think the density of the smoke is decreasing; the fire must be dying out."

"Go and see," said I, to Okra.

Okra dropped upon his knees, knowing that the nearer the floor he kept the less smoke he should find, and crawled into the second vault. There was perfect silence. Five minutes elapsed, and the darkey did not return.

"*Caramba!*" said the Don, "the smoke has strangled him."

"No danger of that," I replied. "His lungs can stand anything; he will be back shortly."

"By St. George," shouted Haversham, gaily, as he emerged with a bound from the dark passage-way, "we'll circumvent the heathen this time, sure."

"What have you discovered?" I asked, anxiously.

“*Laus Deo!* what do you think? That passage-way leads through the mountains, out into the fresh air.”

“Glorious news!” exclaimed several.

“And better yet,” continued Haversham. “*Per Santos*, the powder-chest of these rascallions is stowed away in a nice little grotto in there, and the devil only knows how much plunder of various kinds besides. A genuine sub-treasury with a heap of deposits!”

“Bravo!” shouted the group.

“Oh, de Lord save us, mass’r,” grunted Okra, as he crawled in from the second apartment, coughing and sneezing, and half suffocated by the oppressive smoke.

“What’s the matter?” I asked; “is the smoke increasing?”

“No, mass’r, tain’t dat, fur de fire’s gone out ’most; but de debbils wid yaller breeches be ’centratin’ in de fust cave, and is talkin’ ob comin’ in yer right ’way—so dey is.”

“*Santa Maria!*” exclaimed the Don. “We must hurry the females off at once. Here, Inezella, you and Zala, with Ellesmere and half a dozen Llaneros, must proceed with all haste through that passage. And Ellesmere,” he continued, addressing me and grasping my hand, “into your keeping I intrust my sister, if anything befall me. Go and await us at the further end of the passage.”

In an instant we were groping our way along by the dim light of an oil-lamp, carried by a Llanero who took the lead. The passage was narrow, and scarcely high enough to permit me to stand erect, while great drops of water continually trickled down the sides or fell from the roof. I followed next to the guide, and Inezella next to me, in order that I might assist her over the more difficult places. After proceeding one hundred yards in this manner, we paused a moment to rest in the little grotto mentioned by Haversham. There was a great profusion of articles gathered together in this little apartment—ammunition, weapons, several bags of coin, clothes, provisions, and, in fact, the accumulated spoils of many expeditions.

As we arose to continue our course, two Llaneros burst into the grotto, grasped each a canister of powder, and hastily disappeared in the direction we had come.

Another hundred yards, and the welcome light of day opened upon our longing eyes. The terminus of the passage was upon a beautiful plateau, covered with a short growth of green grass, and concealed from view by small trees, festooned with hanging vines. At one side of the plateau were picketed several mules. From the outer edge of the plateau, we could see spread out before us the verdant plains, stretching away southward, and in the dim distance beheld the bright waters of the Oronoco.

Inezella, Zala, and myself, seated ourselves upon a grassy knoll, to enjoy the beauty and quietness of the scene, which were most refreshing to us all, after the excitement and toil of the past two days.

While we were thus enjoying comparative ease, our friends behind us were in a fever of excitement and industry. The guerillas were preparing to force a further entrance into the cavern, while the Llaneros were labouring to give them a warm reception.

The two canisters of powder were placed upon the floor of the third apartment near the outer passage-way. Over them were piled all the pieces of rock, and timber, and refuse matter that could be gathered together quickly. From this pile a small train of powder was laid, extending some twenty yards into the passage-way. These arrangements having been fully completed, the entire party left the vault, and proceeded toward the grotto. Okra was detailed, or rather volunteered, to fire the train at the proper moment.

The faithful black knelt at the terminus of the train, and in silence awaited the approach of the guerillas, whose voices were now distinctly heard in the second apartment. A bandit thrust his head into the third vault, cast a hurried glance around, and withdrew. Immediately the guerillas swarmed into the chamber with several torches, uttering fierce oaths and imprecations. There were at least forty

within the apartment, when they seemed to have arrived at the conclusion that we had made our exit through the side passage-way. This idea had no sooner occurred to them, than several rushed in that direction.

Seeing the huge pile of rubbish near the entrance, they paused and hesitated to advance. At this auspicious moment Okra sprung to his feet, threw out his long arms, uttered an infernal yell, and touching his match to the train, fled toward the grotto.

The long serpentine flame ran along the floor like lightning toward the canisters. With a scream of terror they drew back in affright.

They were too late !

A terrific explosion, like thunder, a bright sheet of flame, and the air was filled with rocks, timbers, mangled limbs, and bodies. Great pieces of stone were detached from the sides and roof of the vault, which in their descent crushed to death many of the guerillas. The very mountain itself seemed to tremble beneath the force of the explosion, and to rock to its foundation.

In a few moments our party were all assembled in safety together upon the little plateau, congratulating ourselves upon our providential escape. As our enemies were nearly annihilated by the explosion, we felt in no danger of pursuit. The contents of the grotto were brought out upon the plateau, each man helping himself to what he liked. The coin, of which there were three bags, was poured out in a pile upon the greensward, and counted by Don Luiz, Haversham, and myself. It consisted mainly of Spanish doubloons and English guineas, with a few French Louis d'ors, and amounted to eight thousand doubloons, or about twenty-six thousand pounds.

Don Luiz counted out five hundred doubloons each, for Haversham, himself, and me, dividing the balance equally among the remainder of the troop, except five hundred doubloons, which he set aside for Don Felix, as a compensation for the loss of his hacienda.

The distribution gave general satisfaction, and the Llaneros were greatly rejoiced over their good fortune. Having satisfied the cravings of hunger from the abundant provisions of the grotto, the treasure was carefully put up in separate parcels and returned to the larger bags, which were in turn placed upon one of the mules.

Saddles were thrown upon the other two, and Inezella and Zala were seated thereon.

The descent of the mountains was now begun over a rough and narrow path. This task consumed an hour, and we finally debouched into the plain. To our surprise and joy, we discovered a troop of horses near by, which upon closer inspection proved to be the balance of our company. The roll was now called, and to our sorrow we learned that the expedition had cost us the lives of thirty men. This loss occasioned a depression of spirits for a time, but the natural vivacity of the Spaniard soon resumed its sway, and we took up our journey for the river.

As we approached the great river, whose course was indicated by groves of palm and balsamiferous trees upon its banks, we rejoiced over the speedy termination of our expedition.

"Halt," exclaimed Don Luiz, suddenly.

The troop drew rein, and came to a pause.

"What's the matter?" I asked, with surprise.

"Did you hear nothing?" asked the Don.

"No."

We all sat quietly upon our horses and listened intently.

The silence was broken.

The distant notes of a bugle came softly to us upon the gentle breeze. It was a plaintive English air, that recalled to mind happy scenes of my distant sea-girt home.

"By St. George," shouted Haversham, as he swung his cap in the air, "it's McPherson himself! I'll wager my hopes of heaven that the gallant 61st is not far distant."

"You're right, my boy!" I gaily answered.

We plunged our spurs into the horses and dashed rapidly

forward, Inezella and her maid keeping alongside, and proving themselves capital riders. We swept over the brow of a small hill, and saw a scene that caused the flush of pride to mantle our cheeks, as Haversham and I with one voice shouted—

“Hurrah ! Old England for ever !”

The broad surface of the grand old Oronoco was covered with barges, heavily laden with troops. As the little flotilla of sails and oars moved slowly and gracefully along, it presented an imposing appearance. Music filled the air ; banners floated upon the breeze, and polished bayonets and bright uniforms glittered in the sunshine.

From the staff of a large barge flaunted a red and blue pennant, indicating at once the presence of Sir William De Courcey.

As we reached the bank we hailed the nearest boat.

“Who are you ?” was the response.

“Captain Ellesmere, of Sir William’s staff, and Captain Montessa, of the Dragoons. Report me to Sir William at once.”

“Ay, ay, sir,” was the answer, as the little craft dashed toward the flag-ship.

In a few moments the barge of Sir William swept in toward the shore, and the *canoeros* rested on their oars. A few moments were consumed in giving the commander a brief statement of affairs that had lately transpired. The heart of the brave old soldier was visibly affected, and he expressed much sympathy with Don Luiz and Inezella in their misfortune, saying that he himself would take the liberty of granting the Don an additional leave of absence, in order to right matters at home ; and promised to make all needful apologies to Don Luiz’s superior officer.

Don Luiz announced his intention of returning to the hacienda to look after affairs there, and probably to convey Don Felix and his sister to Angostura for safety ; and I doubt not that Sir William would have also permitted me to accompany the Don, had I so requested ; but deciding that

my duty called upon me to attend the General in the expected campaign, I preferred no request upon the subject.

Giving my hand to Inezella, who was standing a little distance apart from the others, and who seemed to me more lovely and enchanting than ever, now that we were to separate, I said in a voice of much feeling :

"Duty compels me to leave you, Inezella—to leave you, I trust, however, only for a brief period. I must rejoin the staff of Sir William. It will, however, lighten the hardships of campaigning to know that I have in you a friend and a well-wisher. *Adios, cara Inezella !*"

"*Adios, mon amigo,*" returned the fair girl. "My thoughts will ever follow you, my preserver."

My heart grew lighter as I felt the warm pressure of her gentle hand in mine.

And thus we parted.

She to the ruins of the desolated home ; and I to join in the fatigues of a soldier's life, and the dread carnage of the battle-field. But beyond the clouds and sorrows of parting, the brightness of the distant future threw athwart the sky of hope radiant beams of golden hue.

CHAPTER XI.

VIVA INDEPENDENCIA!

Duke F.—Good monsieur Charles, what's the news?

Char.—Great news, my lord. A victory!

Duke F.—A victory! Zounds! I must off and see my lady love. —OLD PLAY.

VICTORY! The brilliant and decisive battle of Carabobo had been fought and won. Venezuela was secured to the patriots by this engagement, in which the Republican forces, under Bolivar and General Pacz, defeated the Royalists under La Torre, whose shattered army was falling back, routed and panic-stricken, toward the fortifications of Puerto Cabello, closely followed by their victorious enemies.

The "British Legion" had taken a prominent part in this complete and magnificent victory, and had covered itself with glory. Bolivar upon the field had complimented Sir William De Courcey upon the heroic valour of his troops, and as a slight testimonial of his gratitude and appreciation of our services, had assigned to Sir William the privilege of choosing from his own staff the messenger who should have the honour of bearing the gratifying news of our success to the National Congress, then in session at Angostura.

Sir William's choice fell upon me!

The clock in the tower of "San Michael" was striking the hour of three in the afternoon of the 30th of June, 1821, as my wearied and foam-flecked steed dashed along the "Calle Real" of Angostura, and I drew rein before the hall occupied by the National Congress.

Throwing the reins to a peon, who stood on the curbstone, I quickly ascended the broad steps and entered the legislative hall. There were present some sixty members. At the further end of the hall sat the venerable President of the Assembly, and upon his right was the clerk. Advancing up the aisle, and removing my cap, I handed him the packet containing the full despatches of the General commanding the patriotic army.

"Whom have I the honour of addressing, senor captain, and what is this message?" inquired the President, in a bland tone of voice.

"I am Captain Ellesmere, Aide upon the staff of Sir William De Courcey, and bearer of despatches from General Bolivar to your Honour."

"Despatches from the General; and by special messenger, too! They must be important."

Quite a commotion and stir was visible among the members at my announcement.

"The clerk will open the despatches and read," continued the President, in a dignified tone.

The latter officer arose, and in a clear, audible voice, read the following despatch:—

"To his Honour the President, and the Members of the National Congress.

"Head-quarters, Field of Carabobo, June 25, 1821.

"We have met the enemy, and Almighty God has vouchsafed to our arms a most signal victory! Upon the 24th instant, we assaulted the enemy in his chosen position, and after a fierce engagement, lasting the entire day, we drove him, routed and flying, from the field.

"He is now retreating rapidly toward Puerto Cabello, and our cavalry are in pursuit.

"Great honour is due to the cavalry of General Paez, as also to the 'British Legion,' for their unsurpassed valour and endurance, and to which divisions of the army our victory is chiefly owing.

"Full despatches accompany this communication.

"Yours with great respect,

"BOLIVAR."

At this point, a thrill of excitement ran through the house. Universal joy pervaded the Assembly. Sedate, dignified members lost all control of their feelings, and swung their hats with shouts of applause. The air was filled with cries of—

"*Viva Independencia!*"

"*Viva Republica!*"

"*Viva Bolivar!*"

On all sides the most tumultuous and uproarious demonstrations of joy were indulged in. For a time, all parliamentary rules and usages were ignored in the excited state of good-feeling that prevailed. Members left their seats to congratulate each other, and many crowded around the Speaker's chair, and overwhelmed me with their questions and exclamations.

As the tumult began to subside, I saw a venerable-looking man, with hair white as the driven snow, approaching me. Many stepped aside to permit him to pass, while all treated him with marked respect. Although I had seen him but once before, and then but for a moment, I immediately recognised

him. No person could see the commanding form and dignified carriage of Don Felix De Montessa and ever forget him.

"Permit me to congratulate you upon your safe return, Captain Ellesmere," said the Don with a warm grasp of the hand.

"Thank you, sir," I replied, respectfully.

"Know you aught of my son?" continued the Don, in a tone low and sad, and quivering with anxiety.

"He passed through the battle unharmed, and, as usual, Don Luiz was the bravest of the brave."

"Thank God for his safety," replied the Don, with a sigh of relief. "We are staying in the city now, captain, and shall expect to see you at your earliest convenience," he continued, handing me a card and withdrawing.

A hurried motion for adjournment was put and carried, and the members began to separate, to spread the glad tidings throughout the city.

Remounting my horse, I was soon installed in my old quarters at the "San Marco." After a capital lunch, I proceeded to perform my ablutions and make my toilet, preparatory to calling upon Inezella, whom, it is superfluous to say, I was exceedingly anxious to see, both on my own account, and to deliver in person a note from Don Luiz.

After our separation, five weeks previously, Don Felix had removed with Inezella to Angostura, taking his seat in Congress, and leaving Ramon, the faithful overseer, to attend to matters at the estate. Don Luiz returned to the army, and was present at the decisive victory at Carabobo. He was overjoyed to meet me, and had delivered to me a note from his sister, full of gratitude for my kindness toward her, and well-wishes for my prosperity, and urging me to call upon them, should I return to Angostura.

The day was drawing to a close as I left the hotel. The last rays of the departing sun poured a flood of mellow light over the city, tinting the roofs of the houses and

church spires with a golden hue. The card handed me by Don Felix ran thus—

“DON FELIX DE MONTESSA,
Villa Cara,
Calle del Rosario.”

This direction was sufficient, and I leisurely pursued my way towards the “Street of the Rosary,” one of the most aristocratic avenues in the city. The Don’s residence was a moderate-sized mansion, well proportioned and very tasty in design. There was a verandah in front, and a balcony supported by several fluted columns. The windows reached to the floor and opened upon the verandah. The building stood a few rods from the street, with a beautiful lawn in front, studded with luxuriant trees and shrubs. A gravelled walk led from the gate to the entrance-door. I gave a gentle knock.

“*Quien es?*” asked a voice within, as a little wicket-door was opened and the shriveled hand of an aged domestic was thrust out to receive my card. Upon seeing it, and hearing my inquiry for Don Felix, the servant seemed satisfied, and, opening the main door, ushered me into an apartment to the left of the large hall and withdrew.

The room was high and spacious, displaying both elegance and comfort. The ceiling and walls were painted in panels, and the floor was composed of small brown tiles. Neat white curtains, exquisitely embroidered, hung from the windows. The furniture was mostly of some dark-coloured wood. A small table, with a rich crimson cover, stood in one corner, and upon it a guitar and several books. I was admiring the taste and refinement everywhere visible, when a light step was heard on the threshold, and a lady entered the apartment. I advanced to meet her.

“Inezella!”

“Captain Ellesmere! Welcome to Angostura,” said Inezella, in a tone full of tenderness and joy.

“I am overjoyed to meet you again, Inezella,” I replied.

As she stood before me, her hand still resting in mine, and

her dark eyes looking up expressively at me, I felt that she was surpassingly beautiful. A slight flush suffused her cheek, and there seemed to be a halo of glory all about her lovely face. It required a great effort to repress the wild tempest of passion that possessed my soul. Perhaps a suspicion of the love that glowed within me crossed her mind, for she gently withdrew her soft white hand, and seating ourselves, he continued :—

“You left my brother Luiz well, I understand?”

“He escaped all harm, as if by a miracle,” I replied.

“Was he exposed to much danger?”

“In the thickest of the battle always,” I returned.

“I might have known that,” added the spirited girl, “for Luiz is as brave as a lion, though tender-hearted as a dove.”

There was a moment's pause, which Inezella broke by saying :—

“Don Felix desired me to excuse him for a few moments, when he would be at liberty.”

Scarcely were these words spoken, before the Don appeared, and greeted me with much cordiality. Lights were brought and the time passed very pleasantly for several hours. I found the Don a man of fine talents and great conversational powers. Though born in Venezuela, his early years had been principally spent in Spain. At the age of twenty-five, having made the tour of Europe, he married the woman of his choice, and retired to his family estate to assume the responsibilities of his station.

In return for the many little episodes of the Don's life that he narrated, I gave him full accounts of our campaigning since leaving Angostura. Inezella seated herself upon a low ottoman at her father's feet, and listened with intense interest to all the conversation, in which she frequently participated.

After partaking of a slight repast of fruit, cake, and wine, I arose to depart, receiving an urgent invitation from both Inezella and the Don, to call as often as it suited my convenience. Promising to avail myself of the generous invita-

tion, and bidding them good night, I threw my military cloak about me and retired.

The weather had changed during my visit. The sky had become overcast with gloomy clouds, which hurried rapidly across it, revealing only an occasional star, while the wind swept along the deserted streets in fitful gusts, and with a mournful cadence. The dim street-lamps flickered in the breeze and nearly went out.

I walked along rapidly, my thoughts wandering back to the cheerful room I had left and the charming Inezella. With my mind thus absorbed, I had not noticed a man, who, as I left the villa, arose from behind an acacia shrub, and followed my footsteps. The man moved with a soft, stealthy tread, and kept close to my heels.

I do not know how to account for it, but it is no less a fact, that oftentimes one is aware that another is watching or following him, even though one does not see the other person. Gradually it seemed to impress my mind that I was followed. At first I paid no attention to the impression; but so strong became the conviction, that just as I passed an old-fashioned gateway, with a high arch and pillars, and through which flickered out upon the street the faint light of an oil-lamp, I turned suddenly around.

Within three paces of me stood a dark figure in a mantle, with a slouched hat pressed down over his brow, so that the face was partly concealed.

"Die, you cowardly friend of the Montessa," hissed a rough voice, as, with the rapidity of light, the assassin discharged a pistol so near me that the smoke for a moment blinded my vision.

The ball whizzed by my cheek, dashing to pieces a small piece of statuary standing near the gateway.

"Wretch! assassin!" I exclaimed, springing forward to close with him before a second shot.

But, with a cowardice consistent with the brutal assault, the ruffian turned and ran swiftly down the street. I dashed after him, but so impeded were my movements

by my heavy cloak that the villain gained upon me, and turning into a dark alley, disappeared from view.

Giving up the pursuit, I turned my face toward the "San Marco," wondering what could have induced so foul an attack upon a stranger like myself, in a strange city. The whole thing was shrouded in mystery, and was inexplicable upon any reasonable hypothesis. I was confident that I had made no enemies during my brief sojourn in the capital; but, on the contrary, reckoned upon a large number of friends.

The most probable solution of the affair that occurred to me was, that the villain had mistaken his victim, and, recognising his error upon hearing my voice, had hastily fled to escape detection. Having arrived at this conclusion, and devoutly hoping no such mistake might again occur, I was about to dismiss the subject from my thoughts, when I remembered distinctly the exclamation uttered by the villain—

"Die, friend of the Montessa!"

"Strange," said I to myself. "This bravo must have known at least that I was a friend of Don Felix; and, moreover, the villain must be an enemy of the Don."

A wild thought flashed through my brain! Could it be Doblado?

The same height, general appearance, and, yes, by heavens, there was a similarity of voice, too! I was now almost positive that the assassin was Doblado himself. The idea startled me, I must confess. I had hoped that the scoundrel was killed among the mountains; but on recalling to mind the occurrences of that eventful period, I was obliged to acknowledge to myself that this belief was founded solely on the fact that Okra had shot some guerilla officer, whom he supposed to be Doblado.

The black might readily have been mistaken, and the captain be yet alive. In this uncertain state of mind, and with many misgivings, I arrived at the hotel and retired for the night.

CHAPTER XII.

SOMETHING NOT DOWN IN THE PROGRAMME.

On with the dance ! Let joy be unconfined.
 No sleep till morn, when youth and pleasure meet
 To chase the glowing hours with flying feet.

—BYRON.

THE fashionable circles of Angostura were in a fever of excitement.

The President of the National Congress was to give a ball in honour of the great victory. Three hundred invitations had been extended, and the affair was to be the most magnificent and *recherché* ever witnessed in the city. Although large, the party was to be very select, comprising the *élite* of Angosturian society, and was appointed for the ensuing Wednesday evening. Expectation was on tiptoe, and no one awaited the coming event with greater impatience than myself.

The evening finally arrived, and according to previous arrangement, I called with a carriage to escort Inezella to the *soirée*. We had anticipated having the pleasure of Don Felix's company, but indisposition rendered it imprudent for him to venture out. Assisting Inezella to the carriage, I ordered the coachman to drive on.

We soon reached our destination.

The residence of the President was built in the usual style of architecture prevalent in Angostura, with a verandah in front and balcony supported by pillars, and extensive wings on either side of the main building. The mansion was situated upon one side of a small plaza, or square, and as we drove up, the street in front presented an animated appearance. The bright glare of light that streamed from every window revealed well-filled carriages, with prancing horses, footmen, and servants in gay livery, and fair women and bold cavaliers.

I alighted, and, offering Inezella my arm, passed up the broad steps to the main entrance. We entered a hall, the sides of which were decorated with statuary and frescoes.

The saloons were magnificent, revealing evidences of wealth, luxury, and refinement, beyond any thing I expected to see in Angostura. Many guests had already arrived, and fresh groups came constantly pouring in, adding life and animation to the scene.

There was a rustling of silks and sparkling of jewels, while gay uniforms and stars shone resplendent in the dazzling light. For some time we promenaded the apartments, chatting merrily, criticising this dress or that uniform, or nodding familiarly to an acquaintance. A burst of exquisite music floated upon the air from the large saloon, and sets for a quadrille began to form. Then followed a waltz, in which I joined with Inezella.

What dance more enchanting than the waltz? As we glided along to the sweet notes of the music, my arm encircling the slender form of Inezella, while her soft, dark eyes, liquid with joy, were raised to mine, the gentle flush of excitement tinging her cheeks, and long, dark tresses floating over her snowy shoulders, I seemed to be in a fairy land.

We took no note of passing time. The voice of Inezella sounded surprisingly soft and musical, and I felt instinctively that every cadence, as it reached my ear, awoke in my heart inspirations of love.

Soon we passed from the crowded saloon into the quiet garden. It was a glorious night, bespangled with stars glittering in all the lustre of a Southern latitude. Fire-flies, emitting a bright phosphorescent light flitted from leaf to leaf. The air was soft and balmy, and fragrant with the delicious odour of the orange and acacia. The music, as it came floating out in gushing streams upon the stillness of night, added to the enchantment of the hour.

Oh! it was a glorious night for love!

Slowly moving along smoothly gravelled walks, bordered with sweet-scented shrubs and rich tropical plants, we held sweet converse, until, like two fleecy clouds upon a summer's sky, our spirits seemed to mingle into one. I was charmed with Inezella's wonderful conversational powers, her lively

wit and piquant manners. Never, in our previous intercourse, had she so completely thrown off all reserve, and revealed in its true light the amiability of her nature and the winning sweetness of her disposition.

Our conversation paused for a moment, when Inezella said—

“Would that Luiz were here! How he would enjoy this festive occasion.”

“Poor fellow!” I rejoined, “he enjoys society, does he not?”

“Oh, it is his delight,” replied Inezella. “We expect him next week.”

“So soon?”

“Yes; Don Felix received a message from him this afternoon to that effect. I intended to tell you, but forgot it until now.”

“That reminds me, also,” said I, “of some information I have to communicate to you. I received a note from Sir William this afternoon, stating that he had received orders from the War Office, requesting him to return to England at once, as the department desires to assign him to a different sphere of action.”

“Indeed,” replied Inezella, “how you will miss him!”

“Miss him?” I asked, with some surprise. “What do you mean?”

“That you will regret to be separated from him.”

“There will be no separation. When a commanding officer is ordered home, his staff always accompanies him.”

“Are you, then, going with him?” asked Inezella, in a voice of much earnestness.

“Certainly. Orders are imperative, and military men have no choice in such matters.”

There was a pause in the conversation.

“You never visited Europe, Inezella?” I asked.

“Never. You love England, do you not?” she replied.

“Yes, indeed! Glorious old England! Merry old England! There is no place in the world more desirable for a

residence. A good government, a healthy climate, refinement, wealth, civilisation, and all their attendant blessings are there. And London! a gay and brilliant metropolis, full of pleasure, life, and gaiety."

"And there, too, are all your relatives and friends, and those you love," suggested Inezella, in a tone tinged, I thought, with sadness.

"You have awakened gloomy feelings, Inezella," I replied, "for, though I count many friends, as the world styles friendship, in yon sea-girt isle, I have no relatives. From my early youth, I have been the child of fortune. My present position I owe mainly to my own efforts, aided by a lucky star of destiny, or perhaps rather by Providence—

That shapes our ends,
Rough hew them how we may.

But it is a dreary thing to be alone upon the sea of life. Often in the tumult of battle the thought comes over me with thrilling power, who would mourn my loss should I fall? I imagine, as my name is read upon the list of the killed, some acquaintance might say: 'Ah, and so he's dead,' and, passing on to other names, the memory of mine would glide away for ever. Ah, Inezella, truly it is said: 'Every heart knoweth its own bitterness,' and this want of kindred is my well-spring of grief."

"You are scarcely generous, Edward, to your friends; for I am confident that neither Luiz nor myself could grieve more over a lost brother than we would should any such misfortune befall you."

This was the first time that Inezella had ever addressed me in any other manner than as Captain Ellesmere. That it caused a thrill of intense satisfaction to hear my name thus pronounced by her, I need not say. We turned our steps along a secluded walk and continued our conversation.

Reader, were you ever in love? desperately, wildly, madly in love? If not, you can but faintly realise the emotions that swayed my inmost being at that moment. I could no longer restrain my feelings, but raising her fair hand, I

pressed it to my burning lips with all the devotion of a worshipper.

There was no resistance, and I pressed it fervently. Was I dreaming? Could it be mere fancy? I thought the pressure was returned. My heart leaped with joy, and I felt a flush of hope upon my cheek. We had just entered a little arbour, formed by the overhanging branches of citron trees, and covered with thickly-hanging festoons of vines. There were two small benches, upon which we seated ourselves, Inezella remarking that she felt wearied.

"Oh, I've lost my bracelet," she suddenly exclaimed, in a voice of anxiety.

"Not the beautiful emerald one?" I asked, with solicitude.

"Yes."

"Where did you lose it?"

"Only a moment ago I felt it on my arm."

"Sit still in this arbour, and I will procure a light from the house and search for it," said I, hastening toward the mansion.

My form had scarcely receded from Inezella's view in the darkness, when a heavy step was heard and a jarring of the bushes. Affrighted, Inezella arose and stood in breathless expectation, while she pressed her hand to her fluttering heart. A rough grasp tore away the hanging vines, and the tall form of a man emerged from their clusters with a bound.

"Ah, my pretty bird! now I have you," exclaimed a gruff voice, as the intruder laid one hand upon her shoulder, and with the other endeavoured to place a handkerchief over her mouth.

"Unhand me, villain!" said Inezella, indignantly, as she shrunk back in alarm. "Who dares treat a lady thus?"

"*Caramba!* my enchanting idol," continued the man, "don't disturb your sweet temper! Methinks a Spanish Donna might as well permit one of her own nation to kiss her ruby lips, as to yield to the embraces of a dog of a Briton."

"*Santissima Maria*," faltered Inezella, "save me, save me!"

"Oh, rest easy, my bird of Paradise!" continued the villain, "I would not harm thee for a thousand doubloons. Thou wilt yet be mine. You scorned me once; *si, peste*, a dozen times! Your infamous brother disgraced me before his servants; and your cowardly lover, that dastard Briton, insulted me as no man does and lives. *Carajo*, you know me now, methinks!"

As he said this, the ruffian removed his plumed hat, and revealed the scowling features and hated visage of Captain Doblado.

"Oh, Luiz! oh, Edward! save me from this fiend," cried Inezella, now desperate with fright, as she strove to release herself from the ruffian's grasp. She was successful, and with great agility attempted to dart from the arbour; but the villain was too quick and powerful, and again he clutched the frantic girl, exclaiming—

"Silence, pretty fool! or, *diabolo*, I'll thrust this kerchief down your little throat. Ha! ha!" he laughed diabolically, "it might hurt thy little gullet, perchance; but, *carrai*, it would stop thy screeching at all events! Come with me, my beauty, or, *Satanas*, I'll be obliged to carry you."

There was a struggle for escape, but the fierce grasp of the guerilla closed tighter upon the quivering form of Inezella, as the brute forced the handkerchief into her mouth, and lifting her in his brawny arms like a child, again entered the shrubbery.

But a moment elapsed ere I entered the arbour, accompanied by a servant carrying a lantern. I had quickened my steps, for I thought I had heard a noise and a faint scream.

Inezella had gone! There were marks of heavy footprints upon the smooth gravel.

"Inezella! Inezella!" I called aloud.

There was no response, but beyond the arbour I imagined that I heard the cracking of branches and retreating footsteps. I darted in that direction, followed by the servant.

The garden was surrounded by a stone-wall, some ten feet high, one part of which we were rapidly approaching. A large orange-tree, laden with golden fruit, stood against the wall. As we came beneath this, I saw something white among the bushes further on.

My feet tripped in the shrubbery and I fell to the ground. Most fortunate for me that I did so, for the report of a pistol broke the stillness of the air, and I heard the whiz of the ball above my prostrate form, and the sullen "thud" with which it buried itself in the bark of the orange tree.

I sprang to my feet. There was a rustling of the bushes and the sound of retiring steps. With immense strides I pursued, darting roughly over beautiful acacias and other valuable plants. Just before me was a dark figure, bearing in his arms a smaller form. With a shout I sprang forward, and the next instant I had crossed swords with the tall figure, who dropped his burden and turned upon me with great ferocity.

"Hound of miscreants!" I exclaimed, fiercely, "surrender, or you die!"

The bravo laughed scornfully, as he parried my vigorous assault. We were evidently both masters of our weapons, and fought resolutely and determinedly, feeling it was a struggle for life. With a sudden whirl the villain whistled my sword from my hand, and it flew against the wall. With a fiendish howl of exultation, my opponent exclaimed, as he thrust at me wickedly—

"Die, dog of an Englishman!"

I sprang lightly aside, while the momentum my adversary had acquired laid him prostrate upon the greensward. Availing myself of this opportunity, I drew forth a pistol and as he arose fired at his breast. The villain sunk upon his knee with a groan of intense agony.

There was an outcry and the trampling of many feet close at hand. I felt that we were saved, and turned toward Inezella. With a cry of joy, the poor girl sprang toward me exclaiming—

Are you hurt, dearest Edward?"

No! but how is it with you?"

Thank heaven, unharmed."

threw my arm around her waist and pressed her to me, and she nestled her face on my bosom, sobbing as if her heart would break.

There, dearest Inezella, compose yourself," I whispered. The danger is all over."

Several armed servants and a dozen guests from the saloons made their appearance, and at once seized Doblado, who risen to his feet and attempted to escape.

"Carajo, it is Doblado, the Spy!" exclaimed an officer, wearing a colonel's uniform. "Hold him fast! Place him in prison at once."

Leaving the group, Inezella and I made our way back by another path, and entered the mansion at a private entrance, to escape observation and remark. Shortly afterward I ordered the carriage, and we proceeded homeward.

With that light-heartedness and exuberance of spirits so natural to Spanish females, Inezella rapidly recovered from shock and fright consequent upon the attempted abduction, and by the time we reached the residence of Don Felix was as lively and vivacious as ever. Dismissing the coach at the gate, and giving Inezella my arm, we sauntered slowly along the walk toward the house.

A gentle breeze rustled among the leaves and shrubbery. A thousand bright stars glistened in the blue vault above; and the monotonous hum of various insects alone disturbed the surrounding quiet.

How much I am indebted to you, Edward. This is the second time you have rescued me from the grasp of this man Doblado," remarked Inezella, in a voice full of gratitude. How shall I repay you for all your kindness?"

"Shall I tell you, Inezella?" I asked, in a low and fervent tone. Then, without waiting for her answer, I placed her head in mine, and drawing her toward me, said—

"Dearest Inezella, I must unburden my overflowing

heart. I worshipped your lovely features, as revealed to me in this diamond locket, and vowed to search the wide world over until I found the owner. Heaven threw her in my path without any exertions on my part, and I believe the hand of destiny is in it all. I became acquainted with you only to admire, revere, and adore all the lovely qualities of mind and heart which you possess. The more intimately I have known you, the more have you won my affections, until you are now the guiding-star of my future. Permit me, dearest Inezella, to be your protector hereafter as in the past, to cherish you, and to lavish upon you the wealth of love untold. Accompany me to my distant island home, where, amid the luxuries and enjoyments of English life, you may preside over my household as you now sway the sceptre of my heart. Believe me, Inezella, I love you truly, devotedly, passionately. Dear to me beyond the power of language to express, I lay my heart and affections at your feet, a willing and a pure offering. Will you accept them, and render me the happiest of mortals?"

Inezella had not withdrawn her hand from mine, and, as I finished speaking, I gently pressed her to my breast. Her head rested upon my shoulder, and I felt that she indeed was mine.

How long we remained entranced and happy in the knowledge of our mutual love, I know not.

The bell in the cupola of San Michael tolled the hour of two, as I gave Inezella a parting kiss and hurried onward to my hotel.

CHAPTER XIII.

ONE AND ONE MAKE ONE.

"All's well that ends well."

THERE was a festive scene in the church of St. Aloysius. A hundred waxen candles threw a brilliant light over a group of fair women and brave men. Every aisle and corner was gleaming with light, and the frescoes and marble columns and mosaic floor reflected a sea of brightness.

It was our wedding night.

The priest was there, arrayed in his sacerdotal vesture, and before the chancel stood Inezella and myself, while upon either side were grouped our friends. Don Felix looked more dignified and noble than ever. Beyond him were Don Luiz and several female friends. On the left stood Sir William De Courcey and his staff, who shone resplendent in their gay scarlet uniforms. Quite a number of invited guests occupied various parts of the church.

The bride appeared even more lovely than usual. The glowing words of the poet could alone describe her radiant beauty. There was a blush of loveliness upon her cheek, her large, dark eyes shone with a magnificent lustre, long tresses of dark silken hair flowed over her snowy shoulders, diamonds sparkled among her raven locks, and there was such a calm purity of perfect innocence upon her brow, that it seemed as if a halo of glory surrounded her. Love lent an additional grace and beauty to her figure. She was dressed very richly and with exquisite taste.

The ceremony began, and proceeded without interruption to the end. As I gave Inezella the first joyous kiss of wedded love, my heart throbbed with ecstatic pleasure, and I devoutly thanked a propitious Providence that had vouchsafed to me the possession of my soul's idol, and brought to realization my wildest dreams of earthly happiness.

The solemn and interesting exercises being concluded, we left the church to receive the congratulations of our friends at the residence of Don Felix, which was thrown open for the occasion.

After an hour's reception, the company withdrew, and matters assumed their wonted quiet at "Villa Cara."

* * * * *

One week subsequent to the events narrated in the preceding lines, the British frigate *Halcyon* weighed anchor at the mouth of the Orinoco, spread her white canvas to a favouring southerly breeze, and stood out to sea.

Upon her decks were assembled a group of a dozen persons

gazing wistfully at the rapidly receding shores of Venezuela. They were Sir William De Courcey and staff, Inezella and myself. The thoughts of leaving her early home for a foreign land cast a slight tinge of sadness over Inezella's spirits, but the glorious scene that surrounded us, and her husband's smiles, soon dissipated all gloom from her brow, and restored her natural buoyancy and vivacity of temperament.

There was a fresh breeze from the land, and the distant shore with its rocks and trees gleamed in the bright morning sun. The sky was blue and cloudless, and the diminutive waves of the Caribbean Sea danced and sported their white crests in the radiant light.

A distant sail, far away on the horizon, welcomed us on our course, as, with light hearts and happy faces, we glided swiftly through the curling waves, *en route* for the shores of "Merry England."

THE END.

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